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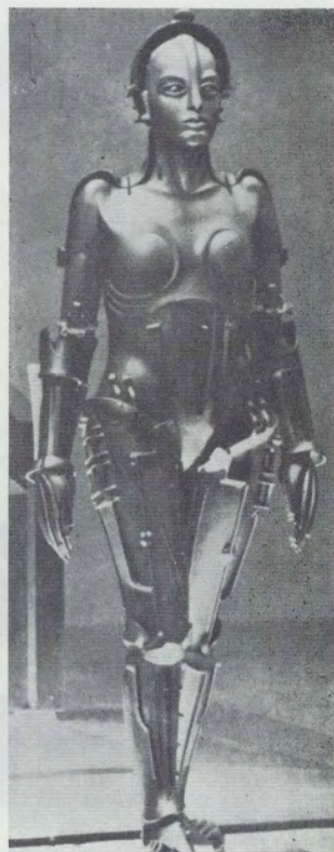
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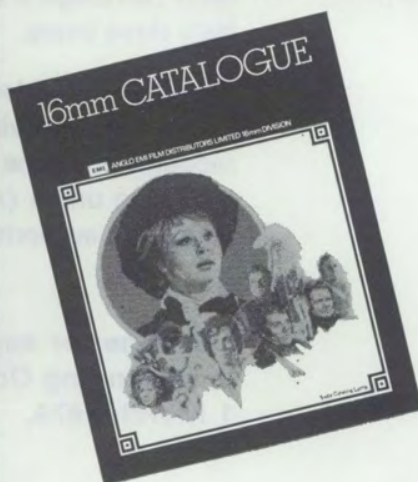
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THE LONDON FILM SCHOOL, a 'Company Limited by guarantee' registered as a charity with the Department of Education and Science, is a non-profit-making organisation which was founded to provide intensive professional education in the art and technique of film-making. Heads of Departments, Course Directors, instructors and lecturers are themselves creative film-makers, technicians or critics and historians of the cinema. The school is a member of the Film Schools Association, the organisation which co-ordinates professional film education in this country, and of C.I.L.E.C.T. – which performs the same function internationally. General policy is laid down by a Board of Governors which also meets with student representatives at least three times each year.

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as well-known films such as *The Big Sleep* and *A Star is Born*. Among the less well-known films are works by Wellman, LeRoy, Archie Mayo, Dieterle, Alan Crosland and Tay Garnett. Other programmes within this booklet period include a selection of French films of the 1930s and '40s, a week of new Mexican films and a retrospective look at four years of the Other Cinema and Politkino.

The February-March booklet will be published during January and will include a further 50 features from Warner Bros., ending with the premiere of a new film from Columbia-Warner. Other highlights include a programme of 20 new and recent Japanese films, most of them new to Britain. In addition there will be a week of Czech films, and a 14-day retrospective of work from the National Film Board of Canada.

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Editor: Penelope Houston
Associate: David Wilson
Designer: John Harmer
Business Manager: John Smoker

SIGHT AND SOUND

WINTER 1973/74

Volume 43 No. 1

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY

Articles	Don't Look Now: an interview with Nicolas Roeg Tom Milne, Penelope Houston	2
	Bringing in the Sheaves Joseph McBride	9
	The Continental Divide: filming Henry James Jan Dawson	12
	Reflected Light: Independent Avant-Garde Festival Tony Rayns	16
	Politics and Autobiography: Marcel Ophuls Daniel Yergin	20
	The Antonioni Report Philip Strick	30
	When We Were Very Young Ivor Montagu	32
	Cinema Weekly and Cinema Truth: Dziga Vertov and the Leninist proportion Seth Feldman	34
	Eisenstein's Aesthetics: a dissenting view Paul Seydor	38
	Truffaut's Starry Night Jan Dawson	44
	Getting Beyond the Looking Glass: an interview with Jean-Pierre Léaud Jan Dawson	46
	Mean Streets: the Sweetness of Hell David Denby	48
Features	In the Picture	23
	Profession: Reporter	28
	Correspondence	59
	Film Guide	64
Film Reviews	El Topo Philip Strick	51
	The Long Goodbye Philip French	51
	The Sting and The Mackintosh Man Tom Milne	52
	King, Queen, Knave Richard Combs	53
	The Invitation Nigel Andrews	54
	Electra Glide in Blue Richard Combs	54
	The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid Philip French	55
	The Wanderers Tom Milne	55
	The Spirit of the Beehive John Gillett	56
	Ludwig—Requiem for a Virgin King, etc. Tony Rayns	57
Book Reviews	Documentary Diary Stuart Hood	58
	What the Censor Saw David Robinson	58
	On Cukor and On Film Making Tom Milne	59

On the cover: Liv Ullmann in
Anthony Harvey's 'The Abdication'.
Photograph by Eva Sereny

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DONT LOOK NOW

Nicolas Roeg interviewed by
Tom Milne and Penelope Houston



On the day we interviewed Nicolas Roeg, he had just come back from a trip to Haiti—part holiday, part with an eye open to possible future locations. A week later, his third feature *Don't Look Now*, an extension in another setting and format of some of the ideas in both *Performance* and *Walkabout*, opened in London to exceptionally enthusiastic reviews.

Although a comparatively late starter as a director, Roeg entered the film industry as long ago as 1947, when he was nineteen. His films as a cameraman include *The Caretaker* and *Nothing But the Best* (Clive Donner), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *Petulia* (Dick Lester), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Schlesinger), *The Masque of the Red Death* (Roger Corman) and *Fahrenheit 451* (Truffaut). He also wrote the original story of Cliff Owen's 1961 thriller *Prize of Arms*.



To what extent was *Don't Look Now* your own choice? A publicity handout says it was Peter Katz, the producer, who thought Daphne du Maurier's story would make a good film.

Yes, he sent me a script; I was reading scripts and it came out of the blue. I was looking for a story that was a yarn, that would complete in some way, or continue in some way, a line of thought. You remember the scene at the beginning of the film when Julie Christie mentions the little girl's question, 'If the world's round, why is frozen water flat?' and Donald Sutherland says, 'Nothing's what it seems'? That isn't in the dialogue of Daphne du Maurier's story—we changed most of the dialogue anyway, because in the film they are different

characters—but it is the key to the whole premise, and is exactly the feeling I have about life anyway. And without stressing that premise, I wanted to keep it within a story form that *Performance* and *Walkabout* hadn't taken. They were yarns too, of course, but they were different movements. One was a film of emotion and ideas; and the other I wanted to make—I hate to use the word because it always conjures up another connotation—a documentary using a story form. Now I wanted to make another film developing a similar idea and not to lose sight of the yarn. To stick to the yarn.

After I read that script, I read her story. I've never met her, but I'm a great admirer of Daphne du Maurier, she's an extraordinary writer. It's not a fluke that such interesting movies are made from her novels. . . . *The Birds*! She wasn't involved in the film at all, but I'm told she did ask for photographs of Julie and Donald to see what John and Laura looked like.

Had the change in the characters already been made in that first script? Was John Baxter a church restorer, for instance?

That was after I came into it. I wanted them to have a background that attracted me anyway. I liked the idea of an international marriage, people from two different cultures and backgrounds. I imagined him as somebody who might have been a Rhodes scholar and had perhaps met her brother at Oxford, so their families had been linked that way. I wanted to have them be almost golden people, so that it became rather like the incident at Chappaquiddick. Like the Kennedy family. They were unprepared in life. Most people are, aren't they?

Julie and Donald got it absolutely, right from the beginning. In fact the whole cast was beautiful to work with. Clelia Matania

is amazing; she's a Neapolitan, and yet she can speak English like that. Renato Scarpa, who plays the police inspector, could speak hardly a word of English, but we didn't dub him either; I found the difficulty of communication he had with Donald, the man he knew was going to be a victim, very exciting.

So the feeling one gets that the police inspector is not really taking in what John Baxter says is real as well as plot-motivated?

Exactly. I wanted John Baxter to feel that he's a detective, another kind of detective, and that here he encounters one who isn't interested in fingerprints or the forensic side of police work. I had a line I took out because it seemed a little too pointed. When Julie and Donald go past the scene of a murder, after they have left the hospital, they are in a motor boat taxi and the detective on the bank has a fingerprint man with him. I wanted to lay a line in there with Julie saying, 'Oh, that fingerprint rubbish is really more to scare people than anything else.' (The fear of the thought that the police can say, 'We've got your fingerprints . . .')

When were you filming in Venice?

January and February last year, and December 1972 in England, on location at the home of David Tree, who plays the schoolmaster. I'd been looking for a house this man would live in, a man who was a restorer. And then we found David Tree's house, and he was so perfect for the schoolmaster that we begged him to play it. The house is half wood and half brick; it was right in line with the idea that this couple hadn't finally made up their minds about how they wanted to live, hadn't decided on Georgian, Tudor or modern. They were halfway all the time.

Were you thinking of the house simply as the sort of place they would live in, rather than from the 'Nothing's what it seems' point of view? When you see it the second time, in the funeral flashback, it's almost like a different house.

It just fitted that way. Oddly, things like that happened with the movie. Omens. I didn't want to shoot those scenes on two locations—pond and house—and I'd been looking for weeks for a house. Finally we had to settle it, and the guy I'd had out scouting said, well, there's this house, there's this one, and that one's no good. Wait a minute, I said, looking at the polaroid he'd put aside as no use, this is incredible; and we got in the car and drove off.

In Venice, it's all location. We filmed in the Europa Hotel, and the Baxters' suite was in the Bauer Grünwald . . . just to be able to pull the camera back, because the Europa rooms were very small. The little man who plays the hotel manager was a critic; he reviewed a Fellini movie, and then Fellini used him in a film. And he wrote most of his own dialogue. I'd said to him, 'I'd really like you to be a hotel manager who doesn't like the guests.' Immediately he said, 'I love it, I love it! Please let me work on this man.'

One of the fascinating things in the film is your use of detail and the way the detail builds up—motifs like the breaking glass, the colour red. How does this generate in your mind? Where does it start from?

I like working for a long, long time on a script. Consequently, the first draft is

'Don't Look Now': Donald Sutherland falls from the scaffolding while the bishop (Massimo Serato) watches





'Don't Look Now': child and parents (Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie) in the opening sequence

usually the one that is set up as a movie. I like to work with the writers until I've actually got the scenes so that I can work on them with the artists. So that kind of detail I have in the script, because I want the prop men totally aware of what they've got to get; it's written down and that's it. The whole film was shot in eight weeks, and you get into a state of tremendous confusion if you suddenly have to send out for something. I prefer to do that kind of thing in advance, and then one can really have a game with the film.

But is the broken glass followed through in the script, for instance? Is the build-up of the motif conscious from the outset?

That particular thing was absolutely conscious. It stemmed from a story, a personal story. A friend of mine might have been able to save . . . to prevent a dreadful incident . . . he said . . . if he'd been able to break some glass at the time. Apart from any symbolic quality, glass sets up a sensation of fear, of something dangerous and brittle. This is built into everyone. Almost everyone has a fear of shattered glass. Mirrors and glass, glass especially, so fragile . . . so firm at one moment and so dangerous the next, it's frightening.

The red, the flowers and so on, was also planned in the script. Obviously there are things that link up as you work, and you think, 'My God, that's odd!' It's curious too—I'm sure other film-

makers must have noticed this—how you think of an idea, you work on it for six months, and suddenly there are eight other films all with the same idea. 'Oh, God,' you think, 'I thought I was keeping it a secret!' I'm sure it's because of the link between all of us somewhere; we're being tipped off in the same way in making our films.

So when you're planning a script, you're consciously putting in visual associations, even ones that audiences may not get?

It helps me. One of you mentioned in your review of *Don't Look Now* the cut to the shot of the two sisters laughing, saying it implied that the sisters were maybe fakes. That was absolutely intentional. But that laughing shot wasn't in the script; it came later when we were shooting. I thought they were getting away with too much, those two Scottish sisters, being too definitely and certainly clairvoyant; as we were shooting they were becoming more and more obvious for the audience. The way the yarn had been told they were so innocent. So I changed my original idea, and in the scene with the photographs of the children and the little bust—an unusual thing to have a bust of your child: I wanted it so that the blind woman could feel it and touch it—I had the other sister interrupt angrily. You realise that she hadn't heard the blind sister tell Laura that the child

was dead, so it was quite reasonable for her to be shocked at Laura touching what might be something sacred. And so when they were laughing earlier, it's conjecture that maybe they were remembering some other incident with the children.

So that laughing shot is not just a Hitchcockian trick, it's mainly worked out in terms of the characters?

Absolutely. I wanted it to appear bizarre, but stemming from something that was totally natural and ordinary for them to do. But within that situation it's . . . curious.

How about the actual cutting of the film, is that all planned at the script stage too? For instance, the intercutting in the love scene . . .

No, that was in the shooting—two-thirds in the shooting and then developed in the cutting. After the bathroom scene in the script, I hadn't anything: just 'they made love . . . and went out to dinner.' But we got to a point in the film where I desperately wanted the feeling that at that moment of making love she might have become pregnant again. I had that in mind; and the way they behave afterwards in getting dressed . . . I wanted to make clear that it's not just some billing and cooing. I really hope it works on this level, and that's why I'm upset by an article in the *Daily Mail** this morning which tries to make a sensation out of the love scene. Things like that destroy the scene. It isn't a sexual scene, a sensual scene; I wanted to get a reality to it of two human beings.

The *Mail* suggested that the scene had been cut in America. Is that true?

Well, I delivered it to America about six weeks ago, but it doesn't come out there until January. You know the traumas they're having over there with censorship: theatre owners are frightened of showing the films, because they are the ones that stand to get hit. Putting it briefly, they don't mind violence but they do mind sex.

Anyway, *Don't Look Now* hasn't been shown yet officially to any American censorship board, but the distributors have said that they don't want to run the risk of getting a rating that will exclude certain cinemas. So it looks likely that it will be cut unless we can get it off to a better start here. That's why a story like the one in the *Mail* is so upsetting. I feel very strongly about all this in films: I love the idea of a theatre marquee and showmanship, but I don't think you tease people.

Were you aware that the intercutting in this sequence would help with the time ambivalence in the film?

Oh yes.

And did the sequence dictate the choice of the two shots at the beginning of the film? The pond and the shower stall—losing one child and, as you've just said, perhaps conceiving another.

No . . . I wanted to have the background to the titles from two separate sections of the film: one from the beginning and one from the second part. The titles I'd originally planned for the film were based on the Möbius curve, but everyone was buying

*One of the frankest love scenes ever to be filmed is likely to plunge lovely Julie Christie into the biggest censorship row since *Last Tango in Paris* (*Daily Mail*, October 5, 1973). So far, the row has not materialised, and Miss Christie remains unplugged.

those Escher books and that suddenly seemed a little obvious. So I thought well, perhaps that window thing and the pond would work. They were suggested by the editor. In the very first draft of the script, the whole opening scene was written as a pre-title sequence, which didn't seem to work because it always splits a film somehow. I wanted it linked by the drill and the cut on Laura's scream; if that had been a pre-title sequence, it would have just fallen apart. I wanted it to be shot forward in time. Allan Scott and Chris Bryant did a terrific job, I think, in the writing after that opening scene, that part of the film where the audience is shot forward and hopefully is saying 'What? . . . where am I? . . . what's happening?' That scene in the restaurant, bringing it down again in level before they meet the sisters, keeping it not too long and not too short . . . it took ages and ages. They did a very clever job working in the letter Laura's writing.

The last shot of the opening sequence, of Julie Christie screaming, is very tight. Presumably you cut that back in the editing?

No, that was in the script: 'short scream' and the cut to the drill. That's what I asked Julie for: 'Make it a short scream!' At the same time she tore a piece of her hair out. This had happened to a friend of mine, a similar shock, an instant shock. I wanted Julie to have that look, to take it in *instantly*.

You mentioned the Moebius curve; was that book in the opening sequence a genuine one, *The Fragile Geometry of Space*?

No, it's John Baxter's book; I imagined it maybe as a treatise he'd written. Actually, it's rather a shame, you can't really see it properly. We got a repro thing of the cover done and they didn't make a very good job of it. Only the white of the title stood out.

What about the emphasis on religious objects, which isn't in the original at all?

It isn't a bible-thumping film or a Catholic piece, but it is about faith in its way, faith in a wider sense. I wanted a man who is a prince of the church, a bishop, whose faith was linked to all faiths; but he was stuck with *his* form. So he was not really a doubting bishop, but . . . I have a little mirror of this before the scene of John's fall in the church, when the priest is showing his Byzantine crucifix to the bishop and explaining it, and the bishop says 'very nice, very interesting' as though he's quite aloof and uninvolved.

The priest of the church was extraordinary. When I went to see him on the recce for locations, he told me that story of the crucifix, but brilliantly, theatrically . . . a theatrical priest in a marvellously greasy cassock. We wanted to use him in the film, but he couldn't do it without authority from the Vatican. That meant sending them the script and that wasn't possible, so we cast an actor. I had a scene stemming from that recce: when John Baxter falls, the priest who was so involved with the church is hiding, and the bishop who had seemed aloof is standing right in the way of that toppling scaffolding. And he couldn't do anything. Another total frustration; and in that he was linked to the two women.

Did you have anything particular in mind with the mosaic John is restoring when the accident happens? It's almost like

completing a picture of himself, like breaking a mirror or something when he falls.

It wasn't that. What I wanted to do with the mosaic was certainly to have that face he was building up, remaking. But it stemmed a little further back, to the bishop who lets John take the mosaic pieces, casually suggesting by the way he talks about them that they are valuable: they aren't really, but they are if you think they are. So when John climbs up, he's working with something connected with the bishop, valuable things in a sense. Usually people would say, 'Oh God, do be careful with them.' I wanted to stress the point that the bishop isn't interested in the value, is just watching. Then when John falls, the mosaics fall too; and you see the bishop trample on them. It was really that connection I wanted to stress.

At the time of the accident, when the bit of wood falls, you have time to wonder whether you really saw it fall, whether it's really going to cause an accident. Are you working out an effect like that almost mathematically, in terms of real time, or are you deliberately giving the audience time for that double-take reaction?

I think the latter. It was shot at very high speed, and then the cutting was very deliberately done. I wanted the audience to feel . . . maybe doubtful, maybe that they'd missed something, maybe that it didn't happen. And then to think 'Oh, Christ!' and to have the time to get together with their time sense. You always worry about those things, whether they're too long or too short. It's very exciting that people actually get these things.

Another tiny but quite complex thing, like that earlier moment in the church when Julie Christie is lighting a candle and Donald Sutherland starts fiddling with the electric light switch: was that in the script or did it just happen?

In the script the scene was much longer, though with the same intention. It's very difficult to know until you start shooting in the actual place; but even so I like it fully planned in the script so that at least the *total intention* of the scene is there. We'd lined up a whole series of shots to get through this long and perhaps rather heavy-handed bit. When we started working, rehearsing it and blocking it in, Donald walked up and said, 'I don't like this church at all.' And Julie, who was kneeling, looked up and said, 'Well, I do.' I felt, 'That's it, exactly, that's what the scene is about.' And then suddenly she was lighting candles and he was standing playing with the light switch. And that is the scene.

In general, then, you like to have the script as detailed as possible, but it loses or gains bits during shooting; and any changes are substitutions for something that is in the script to start with?

Yes, I really think I'd feel cheated, or else I'd begin doubting my reason for making the film, if I thought halfway through that I'd changed my mind about what this person was, or what these characters were doing. If I said, 'I tell you what, he's not really like that at all, he wouldn't think that way,' then maybe I shouldn't be making this film, I should be making another film about this man. I like to keep the intention of the scene; I like to know the people. That's what interests me about a writer like Daphne du Maurier: one feels

she has thought about a story, maybe put it out of her mind and then come back to it and developed it—*before* she starts writing, and not halfway through, waiting to see what these people are going to do next.

Just in passing, are you an admirer of Hitchcock?

Very much. And it's not by chance that he's filmed three of Daphne du Maurier's stories.

How about Borges? At the time of *Performance*, although you insisted it was impossible to sort out who did what, one always assumed that Borges must be Donald Cammell's contribution. Were you interested in Borges before you made *Performance*?

It's odd about introductions to things, but I think it was about that time, perhaps six months before . . . I think I came to Borges through Donald Cammell. Donald and I had had a kind of running relationship for years, drifting apart and coming together again; and for years the question of identity had interested me. I wanted to do something on the idea of a change of identity. A book that had interested me for a long time was Nabokov's *Despair*. It's rather like the Poe story *William Wilson* about a man who has a double, but *Despair* is about a man who *thinks* he has a double, and who finally murders the other man to take his identity.

So I had been interested in Nabokov, and Donald I think in Borges. But we have both said that it's impossible to sort out the elements in *Performance*: it's a fifty-fifty collaboration, and an extraordinary event in both our lives at the time . . . because we'd had different backgrounds, inasmuch as Donald had been a painter and then relatively recently a screenwriter, and I had been a cameraman. But one tends to get stuck with things in life, and no matter what you do, it's always cross-referenced back. I suppose it comes down to this puzzle situation again: people don't like puzzles, they don't like you to be one thing one moment and something else the next. When I started out I wanted to be a movie-maker, and it seemed to me that the way to movie-making was to handle a camera. Then suddenly you realise you are inside a business; and that to make films you have to have a job. It was all very departmentalised and very like an industry: it *was* an industry. Then, by the time I'd served my apprenticeship and wanted to make my own films, the industry itself had entered another stage. 'Do it! It doesn't matter whether you know anything about it or not!' Which is marvellous. But that attitude didn't exist earlier, and I'd been stuck at a point where the reaction was, 'Oh, well, he couldn't do it because he's a cameraman.' Similarly, Donald was stuck with being a painter. So we had to make a leap; and we were perfect for each other, we could build on each other.

You obviously felt limited as a cameraman. Was this so, even though you worked on some fascinating films? *Fahrenheit 451*, for example?

It's odd you should pick on *Fahrenheit*, because I think it's an incredible film. It was . . . I don't know the phrase . . . I don't mean it was before its time, it was just an extraordinary film that very few people appreciated. It was a literary film, it was a visual film, it was a perfect piece of film-

making. I thought Truffaut was extraordinary, and for the first time in all those years I felt I didn't mind not making movies for someone else.

Did he leave you free on the visual side?

I was just thinking . . . free inasmuch as . . . no. We'd discussed the style before it started, and I said I thought it should look like Toyland; and he said, 'That's exactly what I've been interested in. It should be like a Doris Day picture.' We did a couple of tests, he liked the visual style, and he left me pretty well free on that. But the precision of the film, the actual set-up of the film, that was his. It was totally his film. We would offer things, obviously; when you like someone and you really admire their work, you can't help beginning to tune your mind to theirs.

I remember when we were shooting the scenes with the bookmen out at Black Park . . . It was a fine day, and then quite by chance it began to snow. François was delighted and said we'd move on to the very end, with the little boy who's been learning *Weir of Hermiston* from his grandfather. The old man dies, you hear the boy begin to repeat the story, and there's the snow: the boy makes a few mistakes, and you know that everything is going to change, that nothing was going to live, the bookmen couldn't exist. Then Oskar Werner, having been given his book in the spring and now it was midwinter, is in the circle and you see him still reciting the first line of his Edgar Allan Poe. I said, 'François, maybe Montag should be a little further into the book by now?' 'No, no, no,' he said, 'Montag was a bad fireman, he is a bad bookman.' I loved that. Montag may have had the right values, but he wasn't particularly good at anything; if you change from conservatism to socialism, it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to become prime minister.

François did another nice thing at the end, with Julie Christie. He got Jeremy Spenser back, the boy from the beginning; there he is, sitting on a fence eating an apple. Julie walks past, looks at him, takes the apple, and takes a bite of it. So Montag was not only a bad fireman, he was also a cuckold!

There are some films, like *Far from the Madding Crowd*, on which one feels you did the best possible job in the circumstances; others, like perhaps *Nothing But the Best*, in which your camerawork helps to make it seem a better film than it is. Are you conscious, in general, of being able to influence a film as its cameraman?

Yes, that is the damnable thing. Being a cameraman in motion pictures is the most extraordinary job because it's nearly at the final decision. Nearly. And over-influence can shatter a director to pieces, can destroy what he's doing. You can never see what's finally in a person's mind. . . . It's a matter of diplomacy, really, because if you become too strong with what might be a weak man but a brilliant director, that's wrong. You've got to get to a point where it's still his film. But yes, you can feel you're influencing a film, and if you feel you're influencing it to the point that you've got everything out of the man's mind there is to get, then . . .

Did you deliberately choose *Walkabout* to follow on after *Performance*?

No. Because, oddly, I had done the recce and the script was written for *Walkabout* a

year before I started making *Performance*. *Walkabout* collapsed, and it was only after *Performance* that I was able to get it going again, so there was an odd interim.

So *Walkabout* could just as well have been your first film. Was that also a case where everything was planned in the script? Had you been over the locations so that you knew it all?

Yes, I spent weeks in Australia. But not Edward Bond, and he'd never even been there. That was quite a different way of working with a writer: the script of *Walkabout* was only sixty-three pages. But Bond is a brilliant playwright, and I think the dialogue in *Walkabout* is quite extraordinary. I was rather sad at the Cannes Festival screening, with the English contingent especially . . . not recognising the words, the style, the blank verse of the little boy, who is quite amazing. I think it was Irving Wardle who wrote an apologia for *The Times* about a year after *Saved*, saying that at first he'd thought Edward Bond was a fake but that really he writes like a god. . . . There's a line when the children reach the top of the cliff and the little boy sums up their relationship in three words, put in different juxtapositions. 'There's the sea./It's the sea./It is the sea, isn't it?' It's beautiful, and it's something a child can do!

What happened was that I sent Bond a copy of the book, and asked him to do the screenplay. He wrote back and said he wasn't interested in doing anything that wasn't an original. So I thought I'd go up to see him; he was living just outside Cambridge at the time. Have you ever met Bond? He's very, very shy. He was living there in a little cottage with absolutely nothing in it, no knick-knacks, just a sofa, desk, chair, a giant television set, a record player. And we talked. I urged him to read the book, and he wrote again and said he'd like to do it; he'd changed his mind because he'd always thought of writing a play about a journey, and could we start on it at once. So then National General were going to make the film. I'd got them interested in the book when I was in America, and had said

I wanted Edward Bond to write it. 'Great, great!' they said, but I don't think they had ever heard of Edward Bond. I think they were thinking of a story about little rabbits and bees, but they said, 'OK, if you think he can do the job.'

So I went to Australia. I had carte blanche and I spent eight weeks going everywhere. Edward had told me that he wrote very quickly; that he'd think about it and then probably write it in the last week; and that he'd have the first draft ready by the time I got back from Australia. I rushed up to Cambridge and asked how it was going. Rather diffidently he said, 'I think it's rather good,' and he handed me just fourteen pages of handwritten notes. They were exactly what I wanted. I never wanted it to be anything but a play; I wanted it to be like *Our Town*, but with Australia as the setting. But while we were talking, I was thinking: I've got to present this as a first draft to National General . . . fourteen sheets of airmail paper! In the end they gave us more time to work on it, and it was a joy sitting in with a playwright who, while he was developing his play, was developing my movie as well. Then National General read it, said no thanks, and stuck it on the shelf. It's an extraordinary piece: it had no scenic detail, nothing—it was a play.

Time went by and we shot *Performance*. Various people had read the script and liked it, including Si Litvinoff, but he couldn't see it ever being made into a movie. Then about three months later, Si came to England with a man called Max Raab, and said, 'Look, do give Max a copy of *Walkabout* because I know he'd like it.' Gradually people had taken copies until I only had one left, and that one I wanted to keep. But finally Si cornered me, as Max Raab was leaving on the midday plane. I took it round to the Dorchester with a note begging him to return it to me, whether he read it or not. But he did read it on the plane, and the next morning he phoned and said 'I'll do it.' Which was . . . startling.

What was it that attracted you to the book in the first place?

'Don't Look Now': Donald Sutherland. 'I wanted . . . a Gothic feeling'





'Don't Look Now': funeral in Venice. Julie Christie, Hilary Mason, Clelia Matania

It was that I was able to question . . . this extraordinary puzzle. I've got a lot of children, and I've been tremendously conscious each time of this question of identity and destiny. It wasn't the visual side of the book at all. It was that here were two people—two people in effect, since the little boy really acts as a chorus to the aborigine and the girl—who by this curious moment of fate were at a point where they could have been in love with each other. They had everything to offer each other, but they couldn't communicate and went zooming to their own separate destinies, through the odd placement of identity, the identity that other people had put on them. The girl came *nearly* to the point where she could have changed, but then in one moment when they see the road she slipped all the way back, tumbled back into this mould. So nearly . . . and there was still doubt in her right at the end of the film.

In a way the theme—of two people meeting—seems extraordinarily similar to that of *Performance*. In *Walkabout* they separate, whereas they do meet in *Performance*. But in a way it's an artificial solution in *Performance* because it is done through drugs. Do you feel you could have worked *Performance* out in any other way, without the drug element?

No, I don't. Well yes, the story perhaps, but not the film. Because the drug thing was not bound in merely with the story; it was also that at the time (and of course *Performance* was released in England a year after it was completed) we both wanted something that was happening socially. The film would have been less pop, it would have been less socially accurate without the drug element and the wide boy inside the de Quincey-like attitude. I don't think it would have had its social contact. Originally, the drug was to have been a quite straightforward, jolly, social drop of marijuana or hash. But then that seemed too easily identifiable. It's a weird thing about what influences people and how much films influence people. The film was quite popular, it had a lot of contact with young men and women who were directly involved in that particular aspect of life;

and yet, so far as its influence was concerned, I don't know of a case where anyone has in fact taken *amanita muscaria*, although you can pick it on Hampstead Heath—it is quite clearly stated that that's what Turner and Pherber are taking, and it's a very difficult and dangerous drug to take. But it didn't become a popular drug, so these people are in fact watching the film intelligently. The drug thing was a comment rather than, in the words of those days, something to be hip about.

I asked about the drug element because it runs parallel to the Borges theme in *Performance*. Although you do merge them, they are in a sense totally separate; and the rather more interesting Borges theme seems to have become more important in your work.

Yes, I think that's true. Basically, I think, because of my fascination with the discovery of identity. I can't but be amazed at the reinvention of people—people seem to be reinventing themselves all the time. I meet someone I've known for ten years and maybe haven't seen for eight, and find he has reinvented himself. You can take it on a social level; you can take it on all sorts of levels. And in *Performance*, with Rosebloom, the man who's reading Borges, the intention was in fact to try to hint that he might be Harry Flowers' brother. Why does Harry Flowers put up with Rosebloom? Maybe because he's his brother.

Do you think this is destructive, all this about identity and people changing their identity? Because it is destructive in your films.

I think it's a destructive thing, because it gets one further away from solving the puzzle. Some time I want to do a book of Colin Wilson's—there are two books of his that I'd like to film. Because he is involved in refining life down to the simplest form of the puzzle, trying to find out in the simplest form where we actually fit into the landscape. And I think that by changing identity you're getting further away from where you fit in, because you are putting yourself in another hole. We seem to be screaming off in the opposite direction; instead of getting back to any

reasonable route we seem to be trying to get away and change our identity, taking ourselves even further away. Indeed, that's what Chas is saying to Turner when he says, 'No, you're coming with me.' Turner is trying to find out where Chas' real identity is, but at the last moment he has doubts. Chas, after all, is hiding so many things; he is changing himself.

In all three films, the impression is of people who at the end are more or less willing themselves to die. Objectively speaking, within the situations that the identity crises have created, they don't have to die. It's not this sort of death wish that interests you so much as the identity aspect?

No, death does interest me in that way, the fact that we seem to go directly towards it, however much we avoid it. It's something that does obsess me, the idea of where and how we approach, and where we finally reach our personal death scenes. At one time people used to go to funerals—I had a rather elderly father, and I remember how he used to go to funerals. But today death has become a taboo thing; again, this getting away from identity. And today the obsession with health is extraordinary . . . that opposite reaction is what I found attractive about Turner, that he always had the blinds shut, he didn't go out, and he didn't *do* anything. It was another angle on that drugs thing: the odd reversal right now from drugs to a maniacal obsession with perfect health. And in spite of that, people do things that will them to their deaths. There's some extraordinary force that is waving them on and they can't help going. At the end of *Don't Look Now*, John looks back just on a cut to Laura; he knows she's there and yet he has to go on. It's a crazy thing. Actually it was done marvellously in much of the demoniac cinema. Nowadays, when people talk of the Gothic cinema they're really talking about camp. It's very sad, because the Gothic is a tremendous cultural influence, not a funny thing at all. And I wanted *Don't Look Now* to have a Gothic feeling.

To reduce it to a simple formula, in all three films you have someone who is either searching for his identity or being pulled in some way towards another identity; and when he finds it, he dies.

That's right; and dies in a ludicrous way, too. I like that. I like absurdity. The thing that won me instantly to Daphne du Maurier's story is the last line, 'What a bloody silly way to die.' It's superb, but it didn't fit. I wanted that to come out of the visuals, not to have John Baxter actually saying it. I did think of keeping the line at one time, but at that point it would have been crazy for him to say anything. You could do it in the film without it. But on paper I wanted to clap when I read that line.

Both the deaths in *Walkabout* were linked, obviously, when the father was put in the tree—because that is a form of aborigine burial—and the boy died in the tree; but for the audience it was a lunatic thing . . . the boy had willed himself to death, had lost the spirit to go on. And in *Performance*, Turner in the end virtually just says, 'All right, do it.'

***Performance* still stands up remarkably well, except perhaps that the parallel drawn between business and violence, in**

the cross-cutting between Chas at work and the lawyer in court, is a little obvious. Similarly, the Borges references are rather pushed at one—although remarkably few critics in fact picked them up at the time.

Yes, I was amazed at that. And it's funny you should bring up the business and violence thing. I don't know which version of *Performance* you saw; because of cuts and censorship, there were about five different versions going the rounds, and in the end I got completely muddled. The business thing was undoubtedly made simpler by that cross-cutting: it wasn't quite like that in the very original version. But what strikes me as odd is that when *The Godfather* came out a big thing was made in America about how the Mafia is really a business. 'Well I'm darned!' I thought: maybe what we did seems heavy-handed now, but people didn't get it then.

One of the most striking things in *Performance* is the subtle identity confusions so that, in the love scenes particularly, you are not always sure who is who; as in the moment when Lucy comes to Chas' bed, and just for a second you think she is Turner. You presumably cast with resemblances in mind?

No, that all came later. *Performance* was a curious film in that we went on the floor and the construction came after. That's why Donald and I never separate our contributions. It became like our lives. We went on the floor with an outline, an idea, and about the first three scenes; there wasn't a script; and the two of us were doing all the jobs of writer, director, cameraman; it was perfect. We got together in a mysterious way, just worked night and day, day and night, and it began to live. When we went on the floor each day, though, the scenes were *exact*; we knew the intention, and the artists knew the intention, so they had an influence in a subjective rather than objective way, insofar as their behaviour patterns would take shape. But the secret of the film, I mean the secret inside the film, was totally locked between Donald and myself. I don't think anyone at any stage during the shooting really knew that little secret. Sandy Lieberman, the producer, had incredible faith; he liked the movie as it was going. But there never was a final script, and it was a marvellous stroke when Warner Brothers flew a man over to stop the film because we weren't sticking to the script. Show us where we're straying, we said. 'Well,' he said, 'I haven't got a copy here, but they tell me . . .'

Yet there are very precise associations and references in *Performance*, similar to the ones you said were scripted in *Don't Look Now*. For instance, the possibly accidental link when Chas tells the lawyer to 'Shut your hole' and Rosebloom repeats it in mime, pointing to his open mouth; Rosebloom's open mouth links with the poster of Turner with his mouth open. Was that accidental or planned?

That particular thing wasn't a planned link. The hole business was a sexual reference, really. That scene, which we shot at the Inns of Court, was written in the afternoon; we'd been putting it off, having shot a lot around it. In a way that's how we worked: it was shot very much out of continuity, so that a scene could be fitted in like a piece from a puzzle. All the opening stuff with the gangsters was written down in total detail before we began; but the

dialogue, the discussion between Chas and Turner, wasn't worked out until it was worked out by the film. Our preparation, really, came in terms of the detail, like the house, and what these people were, who they were, copious notes about them. In a way it's like a play, too, like *Walkabout*; a four-handed piece after they get into the house.

What about something like, not the Borges theme but the shot of Rosebloom reading the Borges book? Is that put in to tip off the audience, or is it a little homage?

No, I hate *homages*. The reason was to help the audience. I hope that films exist longer than the first week; that they don't just come and go, and if you don't get it you don't; that they have various stages of life. So the idea of putting something in just as a homage, to say well, we're all reading Borges now aren't we, isn't right. The idea should be to give constant enjoyment to the film and for someone a year or so later to say 'Hey, you know . . .!' *Performance*, I'm glad to think, is more popularly understood now. *Walkabout*, funnily enough, has taken longer to fill out. That's why I had a second thought about *Don't Look Now*, why I wanted to make a *yarn*, a film that could keep going as a yarn.

In every film one has a couple of things where one can actually feel . . . 'I do like that!' Near the end of *Don't Look Now* there's one. I remember when I was thinking about this shot, and when we talked about it, and every time I see it, it encapsulates for me one aspect of life. It's the moment when Laura rushes out after John, with the sisters crying 'Warn him, warn him!' And at that moment the bishop wakes in his little single bed, and the camera goes in to a picture of where his faith began. He's in pyjamas, lying on a little boy's bed—I wanted it like a prep school bed—and you see, instantly, that the man has got one whole side of his life missing. Maybe that's why he isn't quite understanding life, maybe that's his trouble. He is obviously a sensual man—I mean, when he opens his coat and touches Laura, as a woman she's aware that's not chance. He blows his nose and says 'Coming to stay with me Thursday?', he opens his coat very wide and touches her breast, then shuts the coat. But he's looking straight ahead. Massimo Serato has a marvellously sensual, warm, living face, nothing pious about it; he looks like a priest who's been to every bordello in the Vatican City. Then at the end you realise he's still living in this

The bishop (Massimo Serato) wakes in the night



childhood world. Something has woken him in the night and he looks, for confidence, to where his faith began as a child with that little picture on the wall. I wanted 'Jesus the Good Shepherd', but we couldn't find one in Venice. You can imagine him as a little boy waking up in the night, frightened, and seeing the picture and getting comfort from it. 'Well, that's all right . . .' And the bishop snuggles down again, clicks out his light. And right at that point, probably, there was the link between all faiths; but he didn't get it.

What happened to *Deadly Honeymoon*, the film you were to make after *Walkabout*?

I prepared *Deadly Honeymoon* for six months in America, and we were five days away from shooting when MGM cancelled the film. It's also a mad story . . . The novel is a little pop paperback thing about a couple who go on their honeymoon. A very, very straight couple; the girl is a sort of mid-Western virgin of about twenty. And that first night, in their honeymoon chalet, two gunmen kill a man. It's rather like the opening scene in *The Killers*: a man who had befriended them earlier at dinner bursts into their room with the gunmen following, and they kill him in front of them, then beat the boy and rape the girl. And then—it's a real pulp story—the young couple decide to go after the two gunmen themselves.

There's a lot of plot—it's a lovely script by W. D. Richter, who wrote *Slither*. It really became tremendously interesting, because you gradually found out that the gunmen weren't proper gunmen: they were cheap criminals who had other jobs, and this was a first time thing for them. Close to the end there was a scene when the young couple do in effect kill them; and again its the impulsion thing . . . the gunmen kill themselves, really.

And next is Haiti, is it?

I don't know if it's next, but it must be close. I'd like to make a film that has been haunting me for a couple of years or so. An effect not of disorientation . . . but to have people looking at other people going through the same or similar forms of behaviour—getting up, going to bed, getting involved in whatever dramas the plot might contain—but in a totally different culture. So that your point of non-reference is that you don't understand why those people behave like that, what it is in their background that makes them behave so.

Do you want the next film to be a 'yarn' again?

I think I would like to make it in a way a combination of all three of my previous films. In its form it could be as though I was spying on someone. When I say all three—documentaries try to spy on people. But to be a spy, you have to be a very good spy, otherwise people know you're spying. Documentaries or television nearly got it when it was a new thing to go out and look at people and ask them questions and so on, and then they stopped there. But I mean to really spy, to use the whole form of spying, to put my story inside the spy camera. And I think I could do that in a different culture from my own. That's what interests me about Haiti or South America, or Eastern Europe. It's very difficult to spy in your own home.

Bringing in the Sheaves



John Ford's funeral: Father Feeney leading the procession to the graveside in Culver City's Holy Cross Cemetery. Photograph: Don Schneider

Joseph McBride

As the coffin was being lowered into position over the open grave, hanging on chains from the jaws of a bulldozer, one of the gravediggers lost his grip and took a flying pratfall into a bouquet of flowers. 'A bit of Fordian comedy,' whispered my companion as we watched John Ford's body sinking into its final resting place. His family, his military honour guard, the great names of the old Hollywood, and the remnants of the Ford Stock Company had departed, leaving a dozen people, five of them gravediggers, to take part in his last funeral scene.

And just as in a Ford movie the mood may shift abruptly from comedy to sentiment, my eyes left the sprawling gravedigger and registered an unforgettable Fordian long-shot composition. On a distant hilltop overlooking the grave, silhouetted against the bright sky of early afternoon, were two tiny figures, a mother and son, standing between two large oak trees. The woman was Anna Lee, who had stood in a doorway waiting for her dead husband in *How Green Was My Valley*, had watched from a balcony as her husband rode to his death with the Cavalry in *Fort Apache*, and had occupied the place of honour at her husband's wake in *The Last Hurrah*. It was poetically fitting that the archetypal grieving widow of the Ford Stock Company should be the only member of his troupe watching him being committed to the earth.

John Ford died of cancer on August 31, 1973, at his home in Palm Desert, California, five months to the day after more than a thousand of his colleagues had gathered at a lavish nationally televised tribute in Beverly Hills to watch him receive the first Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute. Although the nature of his illness was a well-guarded secret known only to his closest friends, it was apparent that Ford was slipping away, and the tribute was

obviously arranged as his last hurrah. 'We're glad we got to him,' an AFI official said the day before the funeral. 'We knew he was ill but we didn't realise he would go so soon.' Maureen O'Hara sang a medley of songs from *The Quiet Man*, Jimmy Stewart spun his favourite yarns about 'Pappy', and John Wayne pushed Ford's wheelchair on to the stage so that he could receive the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honour, from President Nixon,

whose presence had caused Jane Fonda and several thousand other protesters to assemble outside.

Walking shakily but unassisted to the podium, Ford said, 'Mr. President, I'm overcome with gratitude. I wish I had the words to express my feelings, but I don't. Tonight is a most important event—the first time a President has honoured a motion picture event with his presence.' His voice breaking, Ford thanked Nixon for bringing the prisoners home from Indochina (one can readily visualise that scene as Ford would film it), and concluded with, 'God bless Richard Nixon.' Touching as the event was, many admirers of Ford felt that it had deviously turned into a homage to Nixon; the television cameras lionised the President and all but ignored the painfully wasted old man in the wheelchair. Still, seeing Ford's pride at being honoured by the President made one's reservations seem churlish. When the band struck up 'Hail to the Chief' and Ford emerged from the wings, being pushed in his chair by his black chauffeur, with Nixon tagging along behind, it was as if Ford, the son of an Irish immigrant saloonkeeper, had become president for a night.

Luckily, 'God bless Richard Nixon' was not his final public statement. On May 28, Memorial Day, he was driven to the Motion Picture Country Home in Woodland Hills to give his annual address on the meaning of the holiday and to say farewell to the 94-year-old Donald Crisp, whose performance as Gwilym Morgan in *How Green Was My Valley* was modelled on Ford's memory of his father. My companion at the burial, Alex Ameripoor, a Persian-born film editor, went to Woodland Hills so that he could meet Ford at the reception following the



Ford's farewell to Donald Crisp (also, kneeling, Harry Carey Jr. and Anna Lee). Photo: John Stafford

ceremony. 'I said a few things to Ford,' he recalled, 'but of course he didn't hear me. I said, "I'm sitting in the presence of history." And he replied, "WHAT? What do you mean?" After I repeated the statement twice, Ford finally got the point and looked at me as if saying to himself, "Big deal." Some of Ford's actors and crewmen, also sensing the 'presence of history', came to pay their respects, among them Anna Lee, Harry Carey Jr., Carleton Young, Wingate Smith, Ray Kellogg and James Basevi. It was an emotional, tearful reunion and it had a classic Fordian ending; while the reception was still in progress, Ford walked out of the door on the arm of his chauffeur, nobody noticing that he had gone, like Ethan Edwards walking away from his family at the end of *The Searchers*.

In his final summer, Ford was visited



Ford's grandson Dan (in army uniform) hands the Midway flag to Mrs. Ford. John Wayne on right. Photograph: Don Schneider

regularly by old cronies, including Howard Hawks, who was with him the day before his death. On June 14, Hawks and Peter Bogdanovich paid him a Father's Day visit. Ford remained mentally alert until his last day, and one evening he called Wingate Smith, his brother-in-law and long-time assistant director, and asked, 'Are you ready to work?' Besides his cherished Revolutionary War project *April Morning*, Ford had been talking about three other films: an adaptation of Maxwell Anderson's play *Valley Forge*, with Frank Capra as co-director; an adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The White Company*, with John Wayne, Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness; and *The Josh Clayton Story*, a Western about black Cavalrymen to be shot in Monument Valley with Fred Williamson and Woody Strode. After hearing of Ford's death, Strode said, 'He should be buried in Monument Valley.'

Ford died in bed surrounded by his family and a few close friends, a scene he had so memorably imagined in *The Last Hurrah*. 'It was a beautiful death,' his sister Josephine Feeney told me in the Hollywood mortuary where his body was lying in state, the tattered flag from his headquarters at the Battle of Midway draped over the closed coffin. (Miss Feeney, a sprightly little woman of 81, was tenth in the Ford family of eleven children. 'I'm the only one of us left,' she said. 'He was our baby brother. I'll be following him before very long.') A Mass was celebrated every day at the foot of his bed, and when the Mass ended that day he growled, 'Now will somebody give me a cigar?'

Those characteristic words were not his last, although when the report spread some of his friends thought they were. Like Frank Skeffington in *The Last Hurrah*, Ford had two exit lines, one for the legend, the other more private. Josephine Feeney's account continued: 'Jack knew we were all there, and there was no suffering, none of that awful rattling cough that so often goes along with cancer. He fell asleep about five o'clock and slept very quietly until the end.' Death

came at 6:05 p.m., and scarcely an hour later the bulletin came over the Associated Press wire, hailing him as 'the greatest American director of the sound film era, as D. W. Griffith was acknowledged the master of the silent movie.' It was then that one could say of Ford, as Auden wrote of Yeats, 'He became his admirers.'

Four days later, after the coffin had been wheeled through the high bronze doors Ford had donated to Hollywood's Church of the Blessed Sacrament, his nephew Father John Feeney prefaced the rosary vigil with a further detail of those last moments: 'Stories of this man are legion, but I think the one which best sums up John Ford was what happened last Friday after he went into a coma. As we began saying the rosary, we heard his voice come out and say, 'Holy Mary, mother of God . . .' This was a man who had dined with presidents and kings, and at the end it was his rosary beads clutched in his hands which gave him hope and consolation.' When the mourners filed out of the church, the organist played 'Bringing in the Sheaves', which Danny Borzage had played on his concertina just before the striking of the set at the end of every Ford picture.

The funeral Mass on September 5 and the burial service in Culver City's Holy Cross Cemetery were mostly bereft of Fordian 'touches' and outward show of sentiment. Ford's friends had lived with the anticipation of his death for many months, and to many of them his release from the illness came almost as a relief. 'Much as I grieve for him,' said Anna Lee, 'I was so thankful he went when he did, because there was practically nothing left of him.' During the Mass, she had remembered the difficulty she once had in crying for a scene in one of Ford's movies: 'I told him, "Sean, I'll cry at your funeral," and, by God, I did.' Noticing white-bearded Danny Borzage talking with George Marshall, one of the few surviving directors of Ford's generation, I asked him if he might be planning to squeeze out a few staves of 'Shall We Gather at the River?' at the graveside. Holding my hand tightly, his eyes filling, Borzage said,

'I couldn't take it.'

John Wayne, who joined George Cukor in escorting Ford's daughter Barbara into the church, seemed to be fighting for control of his emotions throughout the ceremonies. Standing on the steps of the church after the rosary, a cigar clenched between his teeth as he hailed his pals in a booming voice, Wayne seemed oddly alone, an ambulatory statue in the shadows whom few people dared approach. I mustered up the cheek to shake his hand and tell him I had once met Ford. As I started to say how much Ford meant to me, Wayne cut me off with, 'I met him once.' Watching him stride back into the church, I knew I would never be able to capture the inflections he put on that line—half mean, half poignant, half gruff, half broken. Later, at the cemetery, he told a reporter thrusting a microphone into his car, 'It's rough to put a fellow away that you spent 45 years of your life with, in close communication.'

Although, as the *Los Angeles Times* noted, 'the glossy, theatrical aura of some Hollywood funerals was conspicuously absent,' one long-standing tradition was dutifully observed. Subdued pandemonium erupted as the big names—Wayne, Stewart, Henry Fonda, Charlton Heston, Loretta Young, Pat O'Brien, Gilbert Roland, George Murphy, Raymond Massey, Rod Taylor, Walter Pidgeon, Cesar Romero—picked their way across a sidewalk packed with spectators all too aware that today's Hollywood gives few such occasions for rubbernecking. Iron Eyes Cody, arriving in full tribal regalia, provoked near-hysteria among the television and press photographers, who persuaded him to go back down the steps and re-enact his entrance into the church. Of all the directors attending the funeral (among them Sam Fuller, William Wyler, Henry Hathaway, Robert Wise, Vincent Sherman), only Frank Capra received any attention from the *paparazzi*, probably because he's written a best-selling book.

The craftsmen and character actors who were closer to Ford than many of the famous players—second-unit director Cliff Lyons, stuntmen Chuck Roberson and Chuck Hayward, cinematographers William Clothier and Winton C. Hoch, actors George O'Brien, Woody Strode, Harry Carey Jr., Carleton Young, John Agar—enjoyed the luxury of public inattention as they chatted on the steps. Wingate Smith moved restlessly from group to group, making sure everyone was noticed and every detail was running smoothly, just as a good assistant director should do. Perhaps the remembrance that day which would have touched Ford most came from the Stuntmen's Association, which took out a full-page advertisement in *Daily Variety* reading, 'One of us and we'll miss him.'

Timothy Cardinal Manning of Los Angeles, officiating at the funeral Mass, offered in his eulogy an analysis of Fordian themes which lends an official imprimatur to critics who have argued that Catholic dogma is a crucial substratum of Ford's work. Describing Ford as 'the incomparable master of his trade,' the Cardinal alluded to five of the six films for which Ford won Academy Awards. *The Quiet Man*: 'A skilled director will take the great themes of life—love and laughter—and will dramatise them against the green hills and fields of an

island like Ireland.' *The Battle of Midway*: 'There will be war and peace. Men will see perhaps in some obscure atoll in the Pacific the destiny of mankind hanging in the balance.' *How Green Was My Valley* and *The Grapes of Wrath*: 'There will be great themes of human injustice, whether buried in the mines of Wales or in the sun-drenched grape fields of the San Joaquin Valley. There will be all the passion and the power and the pain of life.' And, finally, *The Informer*: 'Deep in the recesses of every heart there will be the sense of guilt, the possibility of betrayal. A great director will take this theme of guilt, the intercession of an informer, and we will all see ourselves.' A soloist sang 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' when the coffin left the church, and John Wayne, marching behind with his eyes puffed up like a battered prizefighter's, could be heard crying on the words, 'He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored...'

Ford was buried in a rolling green valley near the graves of his brothers Francis and Edward. Religion and militarism, so often commingled in his work, took equal place in the graveside ceremonies, with a Navy rifle squad firing salute and a bugler blowing taps. Dan Ford, the director's grandson, wore his Silver Star from Vietnam as he took the folded Midway flag from superior officers and handed it to the widow, Mary, whose eyes seemed to be looking far beyond the coffin—perhaps back to the St. Patrick's Day dance where they had met more than fifty years ago.

Not long before his death, Ford had been promoted from rear admiral to full admiral by President Nixon, who had said at the AFI tribute, 'Tonight I've heard Mr. Ford referred to as "Boss", "Jack", and "Pappy", but I don't like to hear him referred to as "Rear Admiral"'. As commander in chief of the armed forces, I declare that for the remainder of the evening, John Ford is a full admiral.' Nixon later made the promotion permanent, sending Ford an admiral's hat, and one night in July he called Ford from the Maryland hospital where he was recuperating from pneumonia. 'I was lying here and I couldn't sleep, and I thought I'd call and chat with John,' the President said. In a telephone conversation earlier in the year, Nixon asked Ford what his reaction had been to the news of the prisoners' return. 'Frankly, sir,' said Ford, 'I broke down and cried like a baby.'

Places were reserved for the Nixons in the family section at the funeral, but they were unable to attend and sent a spray of red, white and blue flowers to the church; the spray was placed on the coffin at the cemetery, after the Midway flag was removed. The President's statement on Ford's death said that the director represented 'the best in American films and the best in America.' Not a man easily to forgive an insult, Nixon had apparently forgotten or chosen to overlook Ford's hilarious parody of his Checkers speech in *The Last Hurrah*. The strange metamorphosis of the relationship between politician and poet was vastly revealing of the deep ambivalences in Ford's view of America.

'The best things in movies happen by accident,' Ford once declared, and the best

thing at the burial service also happened by accident. While taps were sounding, I heard a whooshing noise in the sky and looked up to see a jetliner streaking directly overhead as a flock of birds passed in the opposite direction, due West. No metaphorical poet could have invented a more involved and more apposite metaphor to mark the passing of this man whose films recorded the tensions warring in the soul of modern America, a land whose natural grace had been obscured by onrushing technology.

Father Feeney closed his book, the flag was passed to the widow, and there was an awkward silence. Everyone's eyes moved toward John Wayne, who was standing a few feet to my right. I was hoping he would recite Stevenson's 'Requiem', as he had at the funeral in *They Were Expendable*: 'Home is the sailor, home from the sea...'. Wayne tensed, his big body started to move forward, then he froze and looked down at the ground, and people began to leave. The service was over. As with the burial in *The Searchers*, Wayne was the one who 'put an amen to it.'

The crowd splintered into small groups, most of the mourners reluctant to leave so quickly. Alex, quoting what Henry Fonda said at Grandpa Joad's burial in *The Grapes of Wrath*, expressed a feeling that must have been on many minds: 'Ain't none of our folks ever been buried without

Mexicans busily preparing the grave worked with professional haste and disinterest (one of them smoking a cigarette), and their white foreman objected when I removed a pop bottle from the mound of earth, telling me, 'Leave it there, we'll throw it in.' Time was running short; the foreman turned on the hose for packing the earth tightly in place, and the bulldozer was roaring its engine and edging inexorably towards the grave like one of the caterpillar tractors getting ready to flatten Muley's home in *The Grapes of Wrath*. 'Ford is to me what Shakespeare is to the English,' said Alex, and the foreman, barely missing us with the hose, shouted, 'You better get out of the way.' I looked at the inscription on the casket cover, noticing that it said 'John A. Ford' (the initial, which he never used, was for his real middle name, Aloysius) and that it gave 1894 for the year of his birth, not 1895 as it has usually been given.

'Let's sing "Shall We Gather at the River",' I said to Alex. 'I think he would have liked that.' Alex, who has an uncanny memory, later asked me, 'Did you realise you were repeating a line from the burial of the young soldier in *The Lost Patrol*? Victor McLaglen sticks the boy's sword in the ground over the grave and says, "I think he would have liked that."' Grabbing handfuls of dirt from the mound next to the grave and each taking one of the



Actor and director: left: on the set of 'The Civil War'; right: Wayne 'put an amen to it'



a few words.' Elizabeth Allen, leading lady of *Donovan's Reef* and one of Ford's special favourites, stood on the sloping hillside staring at the coffin out of the corner of her eye. Hank Worden held court to a group of youthful admirers, his spectral face beaming as they praised his performance in *The Searchers* (the fearsome-looking Henry Brandon, who played Chief Scar, was also in the cemetery). Somebody asked why Ben Johnson wasn't at the funeral, and Worden explained, 'If there's one thing Ben hates, it's going to funerals. When someone we knew died a few years ago, a stuntman, I called Ben and asked him to come, but he said, "I'd like to remember him as he was in life."' Within half an hour, the cemetery was almost deserted.

It has always bothered me that burial services end before the body is placed in the grave; it's for a mistaken notion of 'decorum' that the mourners are expected not to witness the prosaic work of the gravediggers. But Alex and I felt that we had to supply what was missing in the service. The young

President's roses, we stood close to the mouth of the grave and sang the hymn as the coffin was lowered into the ground. We waited for one of the gravediggers to climb out of the hole before we dropped the roses and the dirt on to the coffin, and seconds later it vanished from sight.

Three hours later, while sitting in the shade of a tree reminiscing about our favourite Ford scenes, we watched Anna Lee's son John Stafford, one of the young Australian sailors in *Donovan's Reef*, read the Bible over his godfather's grave as he played excerpts from the soundtrack of *How Green Was My Valley* on a portable tape recorder. We heard Beth Morgan's words, 'He came to me just now; Ivor was with him. He spoke to me and told me of the glory he had seen.' And the final words of the film: 'Men like my father cannot die. They are with me still, real in memory as they were in the flesh, loving and beloved forever. How green was my valley then!' We watched Stafford go and then ourselves left the cemetery, leaving Ford alone. ■



The Continental Divide

Jan Dawson



Tea at the Royal Hotel in 'The Bench of Desolation': Catherine Samie, Michel Duchaussoy, Michel Piccoli. Tea at the baths in 'Daisy Miller': Bogdanovich with Mildred Natwick, Barry Brown

While the greatest strength of Henry James' mature fiction probably lies in his ability to reveal the unmentionable through a kaleidoscope of infinite periphrases, one theme at least runs closer to the surface than most: that of the convergence of a guileless American energy (nourished by seemingly limitless dollars) and the refined cunning of an increasingly threadbare Europe. It seems peculiarly appropriate, therefore, that two directors from very different traditions and from distinctly opposing sides of the Atlantic should have been engaged more or less simultaneously in adapting James for the screen; and tempting to read the fact as if it were the nub of some very posthumous novel, perhaps even the transposition to modern times of one of his existing classics.

One feels, at least, that James would have savoured the difference between the two leading characters. On the one hand, Peter Bogdanovich, in the public mind as American as apple pie, not just in the territory he has

hitherto covered (1968 Los Angeles, Texas in the 1950s, Kansas in the 1930s) but also in the influences (among them Welles, Hawks and Ford) which he now regrets having so freely acknowledged. On the

other, Claude Chabrol, who despite his own susceptibility to the American B-feature, has latterly emerged from the realms of playful melodrama and spy spoof as the supreme portraitist of the French bourgeoisie. Both admittedly began their film careers as critics, though in his own case Bogdanovich prefers the term 'populariser' as suggesting a less analytic or academic approach. But before the great Jamesian coincidence, the only solid link between them seemed to be an avowed admiration for Hitchcock, whom Bogdanovich openly emulated in *Targets* and to whom Chabrol has emphatically nodded in virtually all his films.

Chabrol's admiration for Hitchcock is probably surpassed only by his devotion to Henry James. His desire to film *Wings of the Dove* has been an open secret for several years, and while he can be flippant about some of his own creations, dismissing them as thoroughly enjoyable practical jokes with no redeeming social significance, he speaks of James' characters as if they were vibrantly present, and Pompidou a mere chimera by comparison. Knowing of Chabrol's passion, Philippe Baraduc, an enterprising producer from the Technisonor company, invited him to film two stories for a projected television series. The combined budget for the two films was fixed at approximately £100,000; and beyond the fact that each was to last 52 minutes, no strictures were imposed. Chabrol accepted; two stories, *De Grey* and *The Bench of Desolation*, were shot back-to-back in March 1973, with the Paris region deputising for New York and Normandy for the south coast of England; and the completed films were delivered last June.

Chabrol's choice of stories seems initially surprising, not to say obscure. *De Grey*, published by James in 1868 and not included in the New York edition, is a very slender and exceedingly tall tale of mystery and imagination in which the characters' destiny remains largely independent of their psychology. During the absence in Europe of her only son Paul, the widowed Mrs De Grey strikes a fine balance between egotism and philanthropy by inviting the newly orphaned Margaret Aldis to become her paid companion. Despite some ominous rumblings from the household's resident priest, Father Herbert, Margaret conceives a romantic passion for the young man which is swiftly reciprocated on his return. Warned by the priest that an ancient curse makes the De Greys' first love fatal to its recipient, Margaret formally defies the malediction and blossoms physically, only to discover that Paul is sinking in her place into an irreversible decline. Upon his death, Margaret goes mad. And Father Herbert—in a sentence pregnant with unspoken allusions to the dead Italian girl whom Paul's father first loved—observes that it is always the survivors who suffer most.

In sharp contrast, *The Bench of Desolation*, James' last published piece of fiction written in 1910, requires nothing more supernatural than a woman's unswerving will-power to bring its characters to the fulfilment of their destiny. Lucidity here is the agent of fate, even fate itself, rather than an impotent warning against it. Apart from its opening and closing scenes, the original story—



'De Grey': Margaret (Catherine Jourdan) and Father Herbert (Yves Lefebvre)

which spans several years—contains little dialogue, and still less dramatic action; the cumulative catastrophes which befall its hero are conjured up in a frequently subjective third-person narrative as Herbert Dodd contemplates the sunset and his own ruin from an isolated bench on the front of an English seaside resort.

The story opens with Dodd, a second-hand bookseller who prides himself on a lack of vulgarity that makes him almost a gentleman, agreeing to pay £400 to the formidable Kate Cookham sooner than face the publicity of a breach of promise action in which, she maintains, she will be awarded at least £600. We learn of his admiration for the more feminine and conciliatory Nan; of his marriage to her when her father absconds and leaves her penniless; of his inability to raise more than £270 for Kate; of Nan's speedy transformation into an ineffective shrew; of her death and that of their children. Dodd is a humble clerk in someone else's employ when Kate returns to Properley, dazzles him with a display of wealth and social grace, repays him his money five-fold and explains that everything she did was motivated by her unchanging desire to take care of him and have him realise his potential worth. Overwhelmed by 'a beautiful appreciative candour', Dodd condescends to let her take care of him at closer range.

Chabrol explains: 'James is absolutely the only great novelist I would touch. I've a strong admiration for writers like Balzac, for example, but it would never occur to me to film one of his books. Or rather it did occur to me in the early days, but I soon dropped the idea. Whereas James has continued to obsess me. I'm particularly fascinated by his villains, the idea of expressing evil through something completely impalpable. I suppose I must have more in common with him than I realise, but I don't want to analyse it, because it's likely to prove more harmful than otherwise when I finally get down to work on him. And I do still want eventually to adapt one of his great novels. I'm no longer sure it will be *Wings of the Dove*, it may be *The Ambassadors*. Apart from the fact that Strether corresponds so completely to my idea of heroism, it isn't quite so impossible. Whereas *Wings of the Dove* would need to be at least seven hours long. I've worked a little on the idea of having the story start later, but it's inextricable: a series of interlocking circles moving in to the centre. You have to start right at the beginning, with Kate Croy in her father's sitting room glancing at

herself in the mirror.

'Anyway, whatever the connections, it was James' ideas, and not mine, that I was trying to express in the two stories. As to why I made them, it occurred to me that it wouldn't be a bad thing to go into training, because James spent all his life training for his great novels. *The Bench* was an obvious choice. I thought for a long time about the second story and decided to take one of the very early ones, one that was completely imperfect. And it proved very useful, because it enabled me to observe James' progress, and I hope to make some of my own. I shot *De Grey* first. Essentially I considered it as a kind of rough draft, I even told the producers as much. Especially since James himself had come very quickly to see it as a rough draft too. Even though it cost more (*The Bench* was deliberately very austere), *De Grey* is a fairly standard television drama. Whereas for me, at least, *The Bench* is a little bit more.

'The ambiguities in *De Grey* are so heavily underlined that they stop being ambiguous. There's a strong Daphne du Maurier side to it. So there are points where I was deliberately very awkward in the way I handled it, because there seemed to be a great deal of clumsiness in the story and I was anxious to respect it. For instance, Father Herbert's pronouncements are completely apocalyptic, so we played up the melodrama by casting an old Comédie Française actor (Yves Lefebvre) and encouraging him to intone like thunder. Pierre Jansen has even stuck in some themes from the "Dies Irae" when he's detailing the family curse. Of course it's a gag, but I think it was also a gag on James' part to have him recite that long list of catastrophes.

'Since the ambiguities were so clumsy, it also didn't seem to me too serious to add to them. When Herbert talks about the dead Italian girl, he sounds so smitten that you wonder if he wasn't in love with her as well. For me, it goes without saying that he's in love with Mrs. De Grey. So that if he was in love with Mrs. De Grey and with the Italian girl, it follows that he was regularly in love with the same woman as the late George De Grey, that he was even in love with the man himself! We've also modified the characters in one other respect. Mrs. De Grey (Hélène Perdrière) is more frivolous and less placid than in James' story, where she's an almost completely neutral presence. James emphasises that she lives in a kind of void, and while I've altered the nature of the void, I've managed to respect it by changing her into a kind of fluttering bird. The most substantial reason for changing her was that in the story she more or less abducts Margaret from the church. That bothered me, because it reminded me too much of *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*. So I made the character more frivolous to eliminate the Casarès side.

'No, I wasn't tempted to adapt the stories myself. It seemed imperative that it should be done by somebody who was exclusively a writer. Precisely to avoid transforming complex ideas into images from the start. So I looked around for a French writer with a slightly Jamesian side. I found quite a few, but it soon became clear that Roger Grenier was the one who was most familiar with James. And since he'd already worked for

the television company, I had no difficulty in getting them to agree to him. I didn't give him any formal instructions, although I did mention three or four shots which had occurred to me and which he might incorporate into his adaptation to save me the trouble of having to add them. It's hard to be very specific. For instance, one thing that has always struck me about *The Bench of Desolation* is that it's possible to consider that the relations between Herbert Dodd and Kate are the relations between man and God. In other words, Kate is God: she uses him, but at the same time it's for his own good. So I wanted this dimension to exist, to suggest it but only occasionally to underline it, in much the same way that James does.

'There's also a type of dramatisation which you always find in James. That was why I began with a dramatic scene, of her threatening him. I was very anxious to respect the construction of the story, which was why we also decided to treat Dodd's life as a succession of rapid tableaux. There's a strong melodramatic element in the story: a fast, almost staccato development which we decided could best be rendered by a series of very concentrated images. We spent a long time discussing Nan's transformation and the evolution of the married couple, but we decided it was easier to have the real drama begin with Kate's return. And also more faithful to the text.

'There's a wonderful complexity to the relations between Kate and Dodd at the end. A double vengeance. Of course Kate wins, in the sense that she gets what she wants; but she's also defeated by Herbert Dodd when he says that he could never have done what she did. It's the one point where she breaks down. He makes her beg for his approval, right up till the end, when he literally sells himself, while being at the same time impressed by the outrageous proof of her love. Money is completely physical in *The Bench*, it's always translated into things people take or give. That's why the rendezvous at the hotel is almost like a mass. He has to be dressed for the part before he can accept the money. There's also the idea of transference, of Nan turning out exactly the way that Dodd was afraid Kate would. Of course it's not at all the same thing, but the balance between the three characters is essentially the same as in *Wings of the Dove*. Kate Cookham is Kate Croy with a lesser obstacle to contend with. Kate Croy is destroyed by Milly Theale's passion for life, which survives beyond her death. Kate Cookham succeeds because Herbert Dodd, like Nan, has no taste for life at all, so she can do with him whatever she wants.

'The only real problem with *The Bench* was finding a setting which would not seem too incongruous for a small English watering-place. I thought of Cabourg because of Proust. The Proustian elements in James are well known, so it seemed to me there was no betrayal involved. It wasn't England, but it wasn't a betrayal either. I wanted it to be not wholly incompatible with England, without of course being English. I tried to avoid any obviously French houses, though I must admit there are one or two roofs that don't look entirely orthodox! It was the same thing in the restaurant with the hunting prints on the

walls. It was terribly difficult not to lean a little heavily on the local colour, even if it was false. I hoped it would be acceptable to French viewers, and not too embarrassing to English ones.

'Likewise with the scene where Kate invites Herbert Dodd to tea at the Royal Hotel. They didn't have milk in their tea, partly because the rituals of preparing English tea take an incredibly long time, partly because I think the colour is nicer when it's not clouded by milk, partly because the actress playing Kate, Catherine Samie, was really drinking, and she can't stand milk in her tea! But I did go to an immense amount of trouble to have authentic muffins sent up from Paris, where they'd been baked by an Englishman. And I was particularly pleased with Michel Piccoli's brief appearance as Captain Roper, the man whom Kate Cookham dismisses when Dodd arrives. Piccoli never looks like an extra, even when you only see him from the back. Without exactly knowing why, I've always thought that Captain Roper was an extremely important character in the story. And the best way to convey this was to have him played by an actor who's far more important than the role.

'*De Grey* is interesting because it's one of James' few attempts at historical fiction. Normally he dealt with contemporary reality, but he set this story in New York, in 1820. I admit that the local colour here is very thin indeed. The salon hardly suggests New York; in fact the only thing that's approximately accurate is the painting, which corresponds more or less to a point on the Hudson Bay between 1822 and 1823.

'Pierre Jansen wrote the music for both films. I gave him very strict instructions about *The Bench*. I wanted it to sound... not quite Boston, but almost. A kind of interminable nostalgia. So his music was based on *longueurs*. With *De Grey* it was more a question of instrumental tones. The themes are modern, but there isn't a single instrument which postdates 1830. And I wanted it at times to sound like a human cry, to create a sense of mystery from the fact that you don't always know whether it's the music or the characters speaking. I also gave Jean Rabier a rather strange brief concerning the camerawork. In *De Grey*, the fact that the camera roams around the house but is almost static out-of-doors has more to do with perversity than profundity. But in *The Bench*, we wanted the outdoors to be claustrophobic. So I asked Rabier (and also the girl who found the costumes) to keep Magritte in mind. He's not obviously connected with James, and yet somehow he is. Especially because of the sea. So Rabier found that corner of blue, of pale blue sea and sand.

'It's interesting that Bogdanovich is filming *Daisy Miller*. I nearly chose that for my second story instead of *De Grey*. It's the perfect length. But I abandoned the idea, because I couldn't think of an actress who could manage Daisy. Daisy Miller is James' cousin Minny, and there's also a connection with Milly Theale. It all seemed too delicate to touch. Besides, *Daisy Miller* is James' most obvious story, which means it's the one you should be most cautious of. I think Bogdanovich will have to be very careful in the way he handles the impact of America on Europe. The confrontation

goes deeper with James: to the idea that the refinement of any society or civilisation entails its putrefaction. It's almost a geographical notion in James, the idea that the further South you move, the greater both the refinement and the decay. It's terribly important. You get the same thing in *Portrait of a Lady*. And you need to be extremely conscious of it. Especially with *Daisy Miller*. Because the plot's so trite, it could easily turn into *Love Story*.'

With an eleven-week shooting schedule, a budget of over four million dollars and permission to shoot in the story's authentic locations (including the Pincio and the Colosseum in Rome, the Château de Chillon, and the exclusive Hôtel des Trois Couronnes in Vevey), Bogdanovich had already completed the Italian footage for *Daisy Miller* and had just started shooting in Vevey when he spoke about the film last October.

'What preoccupies you is telling a story about some people that interest you: characters that move you, that you find sad or funny. I think the most exciting thing is if you can tell a story that's funny and sad alternately, or hopefully both at once. The ending of *Daisy Miller* is the most painful thing I ever shot. In fact it's only the second time I've cried while I was making a scene. But *Daisy Miller* is also very funny. Anyway, we intend it to be.

'I know that I'm going to get an awful lot of questions about Henry James, but that doesn't really concern me. I read a story that I thought was very interesting, very sketchy... he himself called it a study. And he meant it, I think, not as a study of the American girl but in the way a painter would refer to a sketch as a study for a larger canvas. I think he did do larger canvases on the same theme all through the rest of his career. *Daisy Miller* is in fact a kind of sketch. It's only about fifty or sixty pages, and it's like a very good treatment for a movie. Just enough to make it damned interesting to make as a movie, because you can fill in certain nuances or explain certain things that he leaves totally unexplained. Or at least imply certain things that he leaves even unimplied.

'In other words, I don't think it's a great classic story. I don't treat it with that kind of reverence. If James hadn't written *Daisy Miller*, I wouldn't be making it. So one is in debt to the author. On the other hand, if Shakespeare hadn't written *Othello*, Verdi wouldn't have written the opera. I don't mean to compare myself to either Verdi or Shakespeare; I'm just saying that I'm sure Verdi didn't go around worrying about Shakespeare. And I don't want to spend too much time worrying about Henry James. Except to take whatever I can from the story that I like. I mean, one is making a movie, not a *Classics Illustrated* comic-book. And whether or not I put in the movie what James meant to say with the story doesn't really concern me. The social aspects of it don't really concern me. The thing that interests me *least* is what James saw in it. Though on the surface I think we've been very faithful to the story.'

Unlike Chabrol, Bogdanovich was actively involved on the screenplay, for which he will share a credit with Frederic Raphael. 'He and I worked out the structure together,

and then he wrote a script. He wrote one draft, and then I rewrote it three times. And then he made some comments on my second version, and I incorporated some of his comments into that. And then there was a third draft, which I did. I did a lot of writing on this picture. Some of James' dialogue sounds a little bit like an Englishman trying to write in American. Even though he was an American, he'd spent a great deal of time in foreign parts. So one had to try to make it sound a little more American. There's a lot of dialogue in the movie, but it doesn't seem talky, although it is almost all talk. I also think it's rather marvellous to have a costume piece in which nobody behaves as though he's in a costume picture. I didn't want the actors to be afraid to make casual about overlapping or stepping on each other's lines. Everybody talks very fast, and it might as well be *What's Up, Doc?* in terms of the pace. It's very fast. I think the whole picture will only play at about 95 minutes.

'But I also want the film to be beautiful. It's the first chance I've had to make a movie which would be beautiful on purpose as opposed to bleak. *What's Up, Doc?* and *Targets* were purposely ugly; in terms of the lighting and the clothes I tried rather strenuously to make them as ugly as possible. Whereas in *Daisy Miller* the tragedy of the film is that anything as sad as this could happen to such beautiful people in such beautiful settings. Of course the film has two definite segments: one in Switzerland and one in Italy. And the first section is more romantic, so to speak, than the second. I can't begin to describe it. All I can say is that there is a big difference, pictorially, between Switzerland and Rome; not so much in the camerawork, but in the texture and colour. Though since we are telling one story, it's not a question of suddenly changing styles in midstream. The people change, but the change is more subtle than doing anything as obvious as a Fellini kind of Rome.

'I've noticed about myself that I'm not terribly keen on gratuitous atmosphere. I hope you can get the feeling of what's going on by following the characters. But what I have managed to do in *Daisy Miller* is to get a depth-of-field, a depth-of-focus, in colour that you usually only get in black-and-white. We did one sequence, the evening party where Daisy is given the cold shoulder by Mrs. Walker, with absolutely extraordinary depth-of-field. We had a room with eight mirrors (the room was already there, but we used it, because it seemed to fit the story and to fit Mrs. Walker's world), and it's really a wonderful scene because you never lose sight of anybody. You see people walking away in the mirror, then you cut and they're coming towards you. It sounds confusing, but it has a beautiful flow to it. You're not aware of it being a trick. We'd have a close-up of somebody, and in the mirror behind him you'd see what he was looking at. And they would both be in focus, which is exceedingly difficult to do. Plus it was all supposedly by candlelight. It took, I don't know, four or five days.'

For his previous films, Bogdanovich has tended to take recognisable sounds (including radio and TV programmes) from the period in question and weave them into

a kind of music track. I asked whether he was going to resort to a score for *Daisy Miller*. 'No. We're doing the same thing. It's going to be Mozart and Verdi and Handel and Schubert. Some people will recognise it, though not the Hank Williams fans. There's music all the way through, but it's not a score. You see the musicians mostly. For instance, Giovanelli sings an aria from Verdi's *Masked Ball* at Mrs. Walker's party; and later Winterbourne goes to the opera and sees *A Masked Ball* (nobody will notice that, because we don't make a point of it). Then there's a string quartet at the party; there's a pianist at the tea; and there's a band at the Pincio which was actually there, we didn't invent that. Daisy (Cybill Shepherd) in fact sings in the picture. We've dramatised the scene that James mentions but doesn't discuss, the scene where Winterbourne comes to her hotel and finds Daisy and Giovanelli at the piano. Daisy sings an American song, "When You and I Were Young, Maggie", which was popular in about 1870; and Giovanelli sings an American song in that scene, which I think is rather funny. He sings "Pop Goes the Weasel".

Apart from dramatising some of the incidents to which James only alluded, Bogdanovich also admits that he has modified some of the characters, shifting the emphasis or developing their motivations. His screenplay opens with Daisy's younger brother Randolph indulging in an early morning practical joke in the hotel corridors; and Randolph, hidden in the branches of a tree, is now also a witness to Daisy's nocturnal flirtation with Winterbourne in the hotel grounds. 'We've made Randolph' (played by Larry McMurtry's ten-year-old son James; Bogdanovich finds professional child actors odious and lacking in spontaneity) 'a little more interesting than he is in the story, a bit more devilish from the start.'

Bogdanovich has also made the character of Winterbourne's severe aunt Mrs. Costello 'quite a bit more human than she is in the story... I don't think I have a rosy view of life. I think the idea of villains is rosy, because it simplifies. People aren't good or bad, they're people. I don't like obvious heavies; they're boring. So in the movie Mrs. Costello is rather likeable, she's rather funny too. One of the reasons I cast Mildred Natwick is because I think it's impossible not to like Mildred Natwick.' Perhaps the most audacious change to the James purist is the fact that the likeable Mrs. Costello no longer keeps herself and her migraines to her rooms, but displays her hypochondria in the thermal baths, from which public place she explains to Winterbourne the social niceties of the Miller family's vulgarity.

'The story gets darker as it progresses. And it seemed to me that if we began at the baths with Mrs. Costello, we'd have somewhere to go. I was worried about it and almost changed it back. But I left it that way, first of all because I thought it was funny. The mixed bathing is authentically of the period. And they're not really undressed; they are even more absurd-looking because they are dressed so much. I felt that, if it could be pulled off, it would be very amusing to see people having tea and playing chess and chequers while immersed in water. And I also thought it was a light

way to introduce Mrs. Costello that would contrast with how accurate she is in her predictions of what's going to happen. So that one would be sort of amused and feel that this was a ridiculous woman (though Mildred Natwick is so dignified in the way she plays it that it's almost as though she were in her parlour); and then one would come to realise that she may be ridiculous, but she's also quite astute.

'Mrs. Walker is the biggest change in the movie. I thought she was a bit melodramatic in the story; I found her difficult to accept because she seemed rather unmotivated except for her social reasons. And I thought there should be more beneath that. I think all that stuff is based on some other kind of repression anyway. So although James didn't talk about it, it seemed implicit that there was something else at work there, some threat that Daisy posed. So I've changed her. In the way I've cast it and the way she's played, she's rather heavily motivated sexually. She's quite attracted to Winterbourne. Eileen Brennan is wonderful in the part.

'Winterbourne, in the movie anyway, is also exceedingly jealous. James doesn't even mention the word jealous and neither do I. But I think it's quite clear that part of

what's bothering him is that he's jealous. In a sense, he's a typical Victorian man with a lot of hang-ups. None of which we detail. It's not a Buñuel movie.

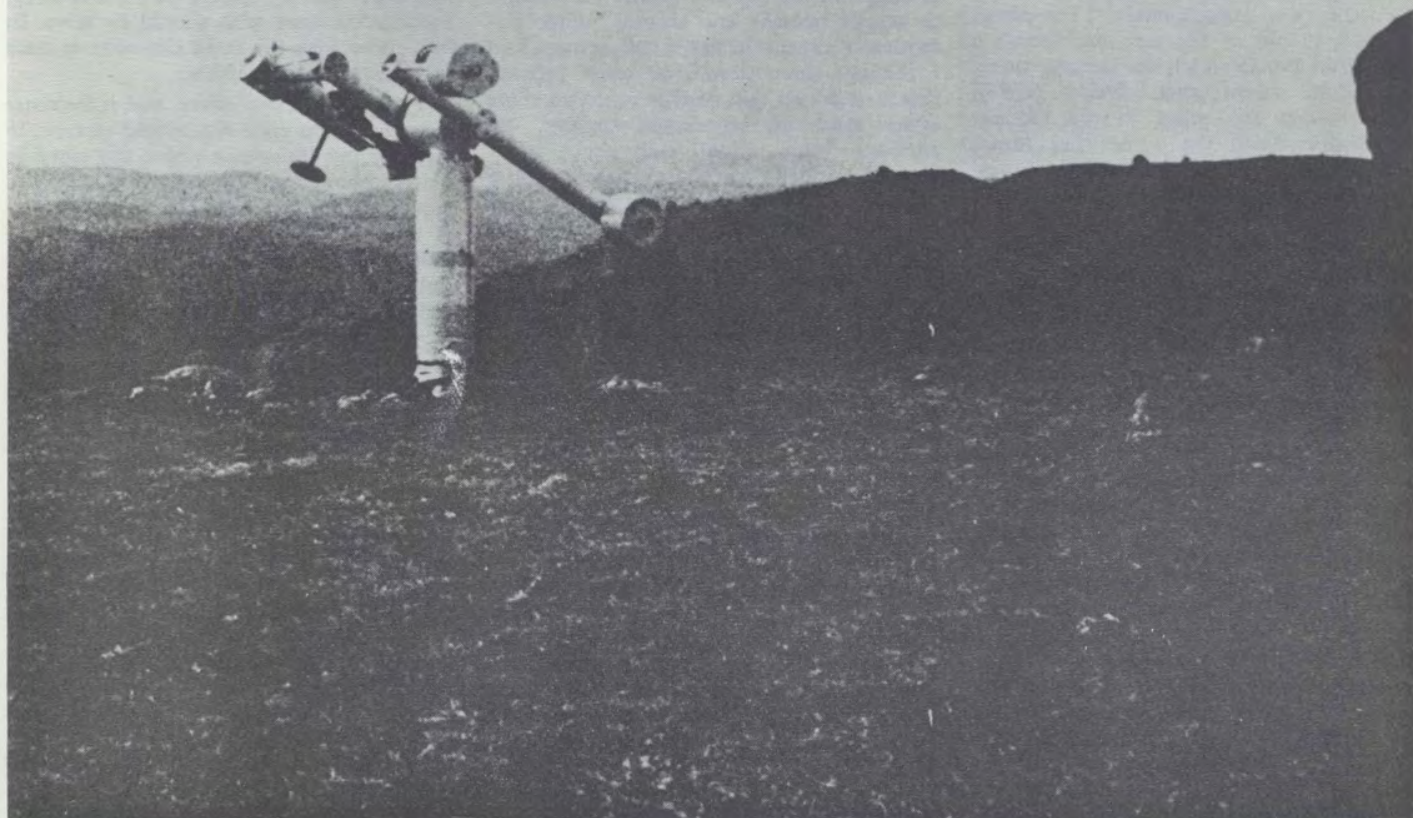
'I sort of treated it as a suspense story... in the sense that there is a feeling of mystery about the whole picture. One has the feeling that something terrible is going to happen, but you don't know where it's coming from.' From its light beginnings, the screenplay in fact builds to Daisy's funeral (the third that Bogdanovich has shot), with which the picture closes. 'It's a sad story. Somebody's dead who should be alive. In fact, more than the main character is dead at the end of *Daisy Miller*.

'I make an active effort, and it becomes more active on each succeeding picture, to preserve my innocence about the story as well as about the film-making process; to rely on my instinct and listen to my instinct as much as possible.' Asked whether he feels that, in venturing into Europe and embarking on a literary classic with instinct and innocence as his main guides, he runs the risk of being compared to one of James' characters, Bogdanovich replies: 'I'm not one who lives too long in foreign parts. I can't wait to get home... I sort of don't like expatriates.'

'Daisy Miller': '... beautiful people in beautiful settings'



REFLECTED LIGHT



Machine devised by Mike Snow and Pierre Abbeloos for filming 'La Région Centrale'

Tony Rayns

The 1970 forerunner of the recent Festival of Independent Avant-garde Film held at the NFT and ICA (in 1970 it was still dubbed 'Underground') was chaotic, contradictory, divisive and, thanks to the participation of an Austrian contingent dominated by Otto Mühl, latently dangerous; in short, it conformed to the pattern of scandal and outrage that has surrounded avant-garde film since the first Surrealist shows of the late 1920s. The newly styled Festival was characterised by a *lack* of dissent, by markedly greater public interest and engagement, and by a loose consensus amongst the film-makers on the specific aspects of the medium most worth exploring and developing.

The change in atmosphere clearly reflects other changes: the continuing decline in commercial cinema as an efficient communications medium, the paradoxical steady growth of film studies, and an increasing (political) interest in the nature and function of communication through an art-form. The changes have taken their toll in the avant-garde as well as in the industry: very few of the figures whose work appeared most relevant or promising at the 1970 event are still in the forefront, although the Festival's careful choice of retrospectives (George Landow, Ken Jacobs, 'concrete' film from Oscar Fischinger to Harry Smith) revealed a substantial historical basis for the contemporary work. The Festival offered a large body of variously accomplished work dedicated to film as the relatively young medium, rich in possibilities, that it is; no other film festival in 1973 could claim as much.

The vast majority of films in the Festival were primarily formal in their concerns, many of the film-makers choosing to eliminate content as such, or to reduce it to a level at which its ambiguities are kept in

check. At its most tradition-conscious, this position involves a re-examination of film language, whether the relationships probed are between shot and shot or between frame and frame. At its most radical, it yields

Malcolm Le Grice's 're-invention of cinema from SCRATCH . . . or at least from celluloid, projector lamp, light, screen, duration, shadow, emulsion and scratch' and an attendant emphasis on the 'performance' situation as the sole basis for the audience's experience. Between the bridge-burners and the film syntacticians lie the so-called 'structural' film-makers, who accept the conventional film viewing situation (screen here, audience there) but throw emphasis on to the processes involved in making the film by transforming the base image in a variety of ways. All three approaches share the view that film's prime quality is its continuance in time, rather than its illusion of motion.

Taka Iimura (Japan) represented this position at its most refined with a 2-hour film programme, and a film installation at the ICA. His films, each exactly 100 feet, consist entirely of black and/or clear stock, with a small range of visual and aural signals added by hand. One group of films deals with the direct experience of defined sections of time, perceived through very minimal image and sound stimuli; another, silent, group offers a series of quirky mathematical schemas (such as the marking of individual clear frames with numbers or signs at regular time intervals) for imposing

a logical or illogical construction on defined sections of time.

His film installation carried the principle to a Zen conclusion, with two long loops of film (one black, the other clear) strung around a room and passing through adjacent projectors. The clear film is visible as an object and as an image in the beam from its own projector; the black film is visible as an object and as a shadow in the beam from a third projector, directed on to the second. The loops recycle themselves endlessly, and the audience is free to perceive time through their inverse relationship for as long as it wishes.

Morgan Fisher (U.S.A.), one of the few film industry professionals attending, takes an exactly opposite path to the same conclusion: his technically elaborate short films 'do' nothing but expose the process of their own making so that each is self-referential to the point of *reductio ad absurdum*. For the 400 feet of *Production Stills*, the camera films a white wall, on to which are pinned Polaroid photographs of the crew taken while shooting is in progress. Fisher's films, by good-naturedly cancelling out their own content, direct attention to their formal duration, which is in turn determined by the technical processes involved.

In the Festival context, the small proportion of films oriented towards content appeared considerably discredited, in much the way that many agit-prop films appear inadequate alongside Godard's recent work. The exceptions were conspicuous, in that they either (like Hollis Frampton) deployed content within a rigorous conceptual framework, or (like George Kuchar and Werner Schroeter) abstracted content and narrative to a level of pure expressionism whose essence is satirical. In *Lives of Performers*, Yvonne Rainer (U.S.A.) places members of her dance troupe in mimed melodramatic situations, acting out the most banal commonplaces of comic-book romance; she is attempting to use cliché the way that others use pure form.

The fact seems to be that the obsessive themes of 'underground' cinema (sexual liberation, political dissent, mental instability, alternative lifestyles) have been taken over by the commercial cinema, a development that has incidentally exposed either the shallowness of the theme or the limitations of the commercial form in every case. Certainly the few genuinely offensive films that found their way into Festival programmes tended to be those that imagined they still had thematic causes to fight: the small Italian contingent, for example, divided its time between chauvinistically reviving memories of the Futurists and contemplating the seemingly remote joys of fellatio.

Inevitably, a few film-makers stood entirely outside the main lines of development revealed in the Festival. Some of them, like Jeff Keen (G.B.), Stan Brakhage (U.S.A.) and Robert Breer (U.S.A.), were pursuing directions that they long ago marked out as their own. Keen's multi-dimensional surrealist collages, through which he now shambles in a new incarnation as Dr Gaz, are still 'rubbing out the word' and discovering fleeting beauties in auto-destructive junk at the same break-neck/moribund pace. Brakhage has unexpectedly applied his plastic concerns to a

trilogy of documentary subjects, shot in Pittsburgh, each penetrating one of the *arcana* of day-to-day life: police work, a hospital operation, and autopsy procedures in a morgue. Breer's new animations, *70* (abstract) and *Gulls and Buoys* (pictorial), reinforce his position as the only animator significantly to advance on Ruttman, Eggeling and Fischinger's pioneering work; both films present a subject, and then explore its dynamics of colour, form and rhythm to the limit of two dimensions, without ever losing sight of the whole. Frans Zwartjes (Netherlands), one of the 'discoveries' of the 1970 festival, showed his longest film to date, *Audition*; an elaborate fiction involving minutely detailed interplay between its characters, the film is a reversion to the style of Zwartjes' early work, with its manic stases, grotesque staging, spasms of passionate energy and aimless, nagging music track.

The Festival included two Forums. The second, on distribution, covered a good deal of practice but no theory; representatives from most of the distribution co-ops outlined current activities. The first, introduced as a discussion on the relevance of the term 'avant-garde', quickly resolved into a theme-and-variations on the question of political engagement. The more articulate 'formal' film-makers, notably Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice and Birgit Hein, expressed their concern at the discrepancy between their political stance and the aestheticism of their work, to which Peter Kubelka made his now familiar rejoinder that artists are politicians who think in terms of the centuries ahead.

Debate of the issue was more minimal than most of the films, and yet the very fact that it was aired served two purposes. It helped to shatter the naïve notion that making films without resort to the commercial cinema's modes of audience manipulation is in some way equivalent to political activism; and it threw into relief the fact that none of the avant-garde film-makers has begun to use his work, whatever its nature, to further political ends... much less respond to the implicit challenge of Godard's political films, which surrender any claim to an individual voice and instead become channels through which numerous voices can be raised. Nearly all the Festival films eschewed political content as rigorously as any other kind (exceptions being two slight films by Joyce Wieland, Ken Jacobs' *Sky Socialist* and a scattering of Dovzhenko quotes from the neo-Futurists); a few, like Peter Gidal's *Movie No 1* and David Hall and Tony Sinden's *This Surface*, adopted an overtly didactic stance as an apparent surrogate.

More than a hundred film-makers showed work at the Festival. Given the impracticality of discussing them individually, it has seemed more reasonable to select individuals and groups to represent the prevalent concerns. Needless to say, none of the films gained from being assimilated into 13-hour days of Festival screenings; and the following reports are based on single viewings of films that demand and require many more.

Right, above: Frans Zwartjes' *'Audition'*. Jack Smith (left) in *'Blonde Cobra'* (1962), filmed by Bob Fleischner, constructed by Ken Jacobs

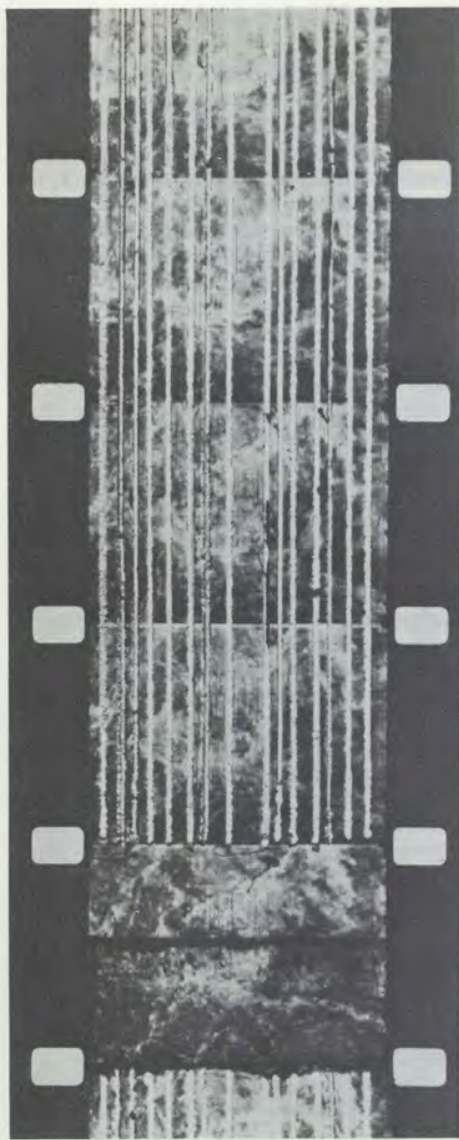
Klaus Wyborny

'Right now, as I work as a truck driver, I like to think of film as being a long assembly line, on which the film-maker sits, and works, putting information to any single frame that passes his path of existence, just like these women do it in the factories, where they build transistor radios, following a planned schedule. Maybe the film-maker also is the engineer who plans the schedule, but, honestly, I don't really think he is.'

Klaus Wyborny (Germany) showed two films, both of them dealing primarily with film language: *Dallas Texas—After the Goldrush* (1971) and his new feature *Birth of a Nation*. The first consists of two very similar short films, which are repeated intact in the pattern A, B, A1, B, A. A1 is visually identical with A, except that it is in black and white, and it has a different soundtrack. The two shorts are sometimes identical, sometimes minor variations on each other, sometimes genuinely different. Both were filmed around a decrepit log-cabin in remote countryside, both feature oblique, melodramatic narratives (A shows a murder, B just fails to show a *crime passionnel*), and both are constructed entirely from static shots which fade in and out. Both are also very funny. At first, the dissonance between form and apparent content seems obstructive; but as Wyborny builds his patterns of correspondences, repetitions and variations it becomes clear that his strategy is to design a solid formal structure that can accommodate at least two different narratives without surrendering its formal strength. In other words, the film's syntax exists on a more fundamental level than its narrative.

Birth of a Nation is possibly the most searching discourse on film language that any film-maker has yet attempted; it was one of the few deeply ecstatic films in the Festival. Only the first half of the film is 'Birth of a Nation' proper; it depicts, in an anecdotal, quasi-anthropological style, the efforts of a group of men in a desert to





Frames from Paul Sharits' 'S:TREAM:S:ECTION,' etc.

achieve some kind of social organisation. An opening title locates the action in Morocco, in 1911; the date evidently refers to the work of D. W. Griffith, 1911 being the year that he began to introduce montage complexities that rendered his 'meaning' ambiguous for the first time. Wyborny unfolds his narrative in the style of early Griffith, shooting chiefly in long shot, maintaining fixed focus and a static camera, editing sequentially and using only unequivocally direct cross-cutting. He acknowledges technical advances since Griffith's day by showing occasional shots in colour, and by adding sound in the form of music and an intermittent, mumbled commentary.

Watching this section of the film is like rediscovering the essence of cinema, locating and defining its extraordinary potency. As in *Dallas Texas*, the syntax eventually subsumes the narrative, to stand as a formal structure, independent of literary 'meaning'. Wyborny himself likens the effect to the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma in Kafka's *Amerika*: an imagined structure that acquires its own autonomy, and exists at once as concrete reality, metaphor and ingenuous dream. The second half of the film is an appendix to the first, using off-cuts as well as the edited material. The now chaotic images, which retain a special charge because of their reference to the first part

of the film, are subjected to a (possibly mathematical) series of transformations that ultimately obliterate their content and reduce the film to the fact of its celluloid and emulsion. Physically, this means that the film is a kind of gathering darkness, shot through with flashes of meaningless, vestigial image; literally, it pares the medium down to its concrete realities, and celebrates them in their own right; metaphorically, it presents exactly the 'sea of nescience' that Jack Smith sings of in *Blonde Cobra*. Wyborny's film suggests that cinema ran before it could walk, and single-handedly sets about the required research to put matters to rights; there is no more important a goal than that a contemporary film-maker can set himself.

Expanded Cinema

The Festival chose to mount all the film events involving multiple projection or projection with live action at the ICA, where a cramped and ill-ventilated room was pressed into service because of its uniform white walls. Despite the handicap of poor conditions, this section of the Festival offered a higher proportion of the most stimulating work than the 'normal' NFT screenings. A group of British film-makers, who centre on the London Film-makers' Co-op because of its processing facilities and more particularly its optical printer, were especially prominent. Malcolm Le Grice, the most prolific and innovative of the group and its most cogent theoretician, showed a substantial body of work that might be subtitled 'the theory of film practice'.

Le Grice rejects the entire accumulated mass of film culture, along with the conventional film viewing situation; he posits instead a phenomenological cinema that has its locus *only* in the direct experience of the film projection situation—in the interaction of audience, light, sound, space, time and sometimes performers. Accordingly, his films are self-referential in that their sole content is simple modulations of a basic image or concept, achieved through equally simple film processes like pos/neg reversals, optical duping, refilming a projected image, and so on. His multiple-screen work frequently presents a variety of such modulations side by side. The form of the work is essentially fluid and conditional upon the circumstances of projection; as such, it successfully eludes the kind of analysis that Le Grice views as destructive of the experience itself.

David Dye (G.B.) echoes Le Grice's 'practical theory' in his programme of film events that seek to dramatise the projection situation by making it as variable a quantity as the image itself. His *Western Reversal* uses a sequence from a John Ford Western; the film is projected on to a fragmented mirror, which reflects the fragmented image on to a screen, and Dye then manipulates the sections of mirror in order to superimpose their reflections at a central point on the screen, an action which reduces the image to white light.

Few of the expanded cinema pieces contain so direct a dialectic with mainstream cinema. Annabel Nicholson (G.B.) generated a series of delicate events, many of them of a winning Heath Robinson-like

impracticality, presenting relationships between physical actions and filmed images. Her most elaborate event draws an analogy between a projector and a sewing machine: an extended loop of film is passed around the room and through both machines, with Annabel puncturing it on the sewing machine, and the projector demonstrating the results. *Two Minutes 45 Seconds* by Chris Welsby (G.B.) was the wittiest and most precise of the projection process films; rephotographed at each performance, it gained a further generation of image perspective each time it was staged. The film-maker stands in front of the screen with a microphone (initially, of course, in front of a blank screen), and announces the film-making process and records the date.

Ken Jacobs

The other notable event designed to enlarge the audience's awareness of physical space was Ken Jacobs' presentation of his *Apparition Theatre of New York* in the ICA cinema. The event was hampered by technical problems and recalcitrant audiences; but none the less successfully incorporated a variety of stimuli: 3-dimensional shadow-play viewed through polaroid glasses, a 'stereo' exploration of the auditorium space through aural signals from different points, and several 2-dimensional films featuring steady lateral camera-motion which revealed an illusory additional depth when viewed with a polaroid lens over one eye. The effect, both playful and earnest, was Méliès-like in its endeavour to restore a childlike sense of wonder to the spectacle.

Jacobs, a vital figure in the founding of the New York film underground, also showed two films at the NFT: *Blonde Cobra* (1962), his legendary companion-piece to Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, and six reels of rushes from his 8 mm feature *Sky Socialist* (begun in 1965). *Blonde Cobra*, which was shot by Bob Fleischner in 1959 and edited and soundtracked by Jacobs three years later, lives up to its reputation as an anarchic masterpiece. Imbued with a distinctively New York attunement to 'human wreckage', the film centres on the personality of Jack Smith, whose desperate person crowds the images, and whose crazed monologues monopolise the soundtrack. Jacobs constructed the film so as to give image and sound relative independence of each other; much of the soundtrack's monologues is accompanied only by a blank screen, partly in deference to the vision of the words, partly in 'poetic' expression of Smith's despair in the face of overwhelming 'nescience'. *Blonde Cobra* is panic-stricken, funny, and ultimately life-affirming.

Sky Socialist carries much the same charge, but has a tight formal organisation in the shooting and a complex multi-layered narrative. Its immediate concerns are: the Brooklyn Bridge (as a socialist monument to liberate the people, tragically flawed by its contractor's knowing use of defective materials); the visionary genius who conceived the bridge; forgotten Brooklyn novelist Isidore Levine; contemporary life in decaying Brooklyn; and Anne Frank's poetic revenge on the Nazi Officer. Jacobs dramatises his themes with a minimalist's sensibilities, using simply staged actions or

tableaux as ciphers, and adopting eccentrically rigid framing and panning as a means of keeping the film syntax accessibly direct. His film has a beautiful formal intensity even in its present incomplete state.

Sharits & Snow

Two of the pioneering figures in 'structural' film showed new work, both still seeking to extend the audience's cognitive and sensory experience by means of formal constructions. Paul Sharits' *S:TREAM:S:S: ECTION:S:SECTION:S:S:SECTIONED* consists of twin layers of both image and sound: a 'representational' image or sound is brought up against a 'concrete' one. Thus an image of swirling water (in fact, a constantly repeated loop) is 'overlayed' with a pattern of heavy vertical scratches on the surface of the celluloid; and a girl's voice repeating the word 'exochorion' (another loop?) is similarly disrupted by the electronic blips of a system for synchronising sound. In this way Sharits sets up a series of conceptual antinomies, in that he presents various stimuli that demand apprehension on quite different levels simultaneously. The formal links are complicated by another random factor: the soundtrack blips synchronise exactly with clearly visible splice-marks in the image. Sharits' only subject in the film is the audience's experiential process in crossing the various layers of paradox to arrive at a heightened position from which it's possible to comprehend the entire form.

Mike Snow (Canada) showed his recent piece *A Casing Shelved*, in which a static colour transparency showing a cluttered shelving fixture in two dimensions is accompanied by a soundtrack tape describing the objects visible in the picture in three dimensions (or four, including time). The tone of the piece is laboured, and the cognitive processes that it activates seem pedantic; the result looks like a work consciously designed to define the relationship between Snow's parallel sculptural and filmic concerns.

More stimulatingly a product of precisely that relationship is his monumental film *La Région Centrale*, a 3-hour examination of a remote North American landscape through an entirely original formal structure. Snow and Pierre Abbeloos designed and constructed a machine to manipulate the camera for the photography; it permits the

camera to move in any direction(s) through space in such a way that its lens traces the outline of a complete sphere, and is controlled by a remote-control system of musical tones. The film comprises a series of takes of varying length, in which the camera moves at different speeds and in different directions across the totality of the landscape, the sky and the ground beneath. The effect is, not surprisingly, extraordinary. Conventional perception of landscape, mass, ratio and velocity is quite literally subverted, wrenched around and inverted during the period in which one perceives the film primarily as a representation of its field of vision. Confronted with the phenomenon of a form that works to this effect, the audience finds itself in a position of unique freedom to determine responses that are other than 'normal'.

The other film-makers whose work contributed materially to this area of cinema were Peter Gidal, Hollis Frampton and George Landow. Gidal (G.B.) showed his *Room Film*, an essentially simple construct based on the shooting procedures that arose during the filming of objects in an underlit room, and on the subsequent editing procedures that modified the initial 'vision'. Frampton and Landow (both U.S.A.) were represented by retrospectives: all seven parts of Frampton's magisterial application of structures from mathematics, physics and philosophy to film-form, *Hapax Legomena*, and five of Landow's seminal shorts from 1965 to the present, each one a precise step in a witty, mock-didactic exposure of the medium's capacity for camouflaging its true nature.

Diaries

Diary films were still sporadically in evidence, as the avant-garde's sole concession to film's direct recording function; but even these were more formally organised than was usual in the Sixties. Bob Huot (U.S.A.) showed *Rolls* (1971), a series of static-camera 100-foot rolls edited together in short equal lengths but random sequence, occasionally giving way to an uninterrupted complete roll. His subjects were his family, and he chose to emphasise the physical functions: coitus, breast-feeding, shaving, masturbation, driving and so on. The imposed formal pattern lends the film a structure of sorts, though by no means a

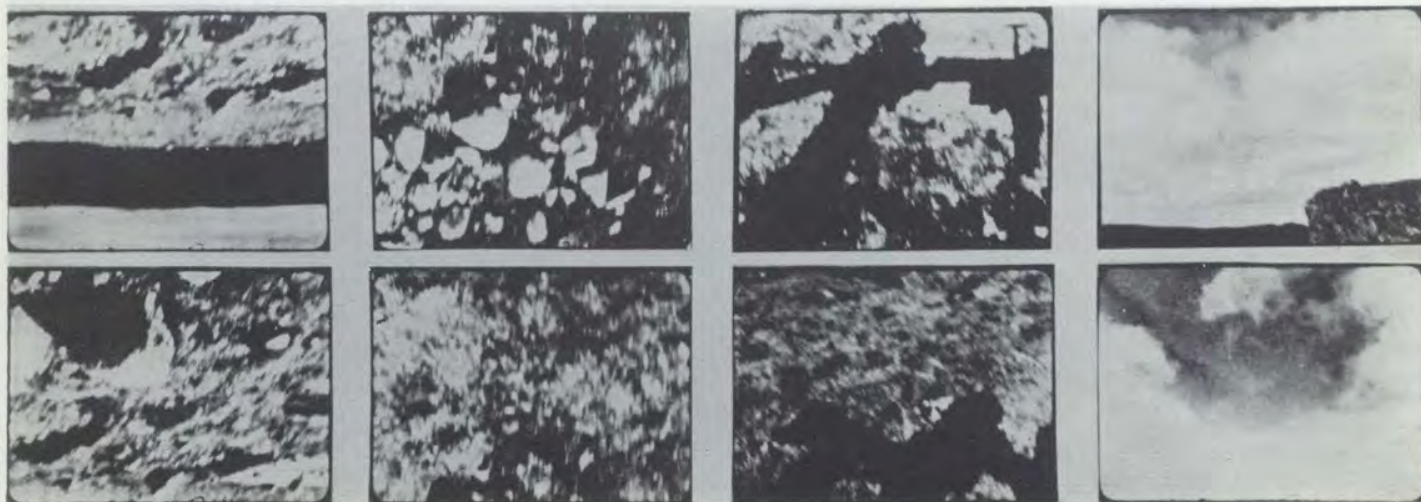
rigorous one.

Jonas Mekas (U.S.A.) showed his *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, a film in three sections showing respectively old footage of the arrival of Lithuanian refugees in America in the Forties, a recent journey by the film-maker and his brother Adolfas back to Lithuania to visit surviving relatives, and a sojourn in Vienna in the company of Peter Kubelka and Ken Jacobs, amongst others. Mekas also imposes a structure on his material, with the apparent aim of teasing out the hidden links that unite these three aspects of his life (Lithuanian nationality; American naturalisation; and his rôle as patron saint to the American avant-garde cinema). But it is not the structure of the film that reveals the links, but rather Mekas' calculatedly melancholic narration, and his consistent recourse to emotive, sentimental imagery. The best of the diary bunch, however, was a 1964 film unearthed by Mekas, showing the presentation of a *Film Culture* Independent Film Award to Andy Warhol in his Factory. The award was a basket of (predominantly phallic) fruit, and the film was shot as pastiche Warhol.

Video

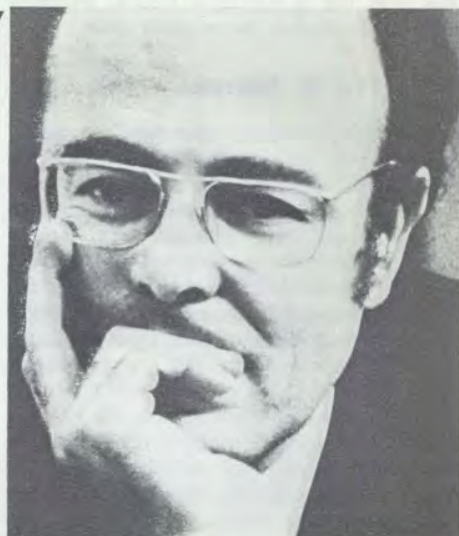
Only two participants in the Festival used video as well as film: Mike Leggett (G.B.) and Peter Weibel (Austria). Leggett showed several completed video-tapes, variously explications of the medium's processes and didactic attacks on the 'professional' uses to which it is put. But both he and Weibel also staged video events, as a kind of extension of expanded cinema, and suggested ways that the instant-playback facility could be valuably exploited. Weibel's *Servare Contingentiam*, a 3-part video-action built on modest philosophical jokes, and Leggett's invitation to his audience to participate in the making of both planned and unplanned video-tapes, served to propose *auto-criticism* as a possible function of the medium. Both men arrived at the analogue of a mirror in their video work; the implication is perhaps that since video recording and playback processes are self-contained in a way that film's are not, it is feasible to use video as an agent for self-confrontation, direct communication or political action without the fundamental ambiguities that underlie such uses of film. ■

Frames from 'La Région Centrale' by Mike Snow



POLITICS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

An Interview with Marcel Ophuls by Daniel Yergin



Marcel Ophuls

'I don't have that many films to show,' said Marcel Ophuls. There's some truth in that, but not because the films are not made. There is of course *The Sorrow and the Pity*, his four and a half hour marathon about the German occupation of France during World War Two. It was widely praised as a path-breaking documentary. Also, as an effort, in Ophuls' words, 'to get round the myth of the Resistance', it set off a tumultuous debate in France and abroad. His first film, *Peau de Banane* (1963), with Jeanne Moreau and Jean-Paul Belmondo, crested on the New Wave, although it consciously followed in the tradition of Hollywood comedies of the 1930s.

Yet there are also the films that are not shown. *Munich or Peace for a Hundred Years* (1967), the 'preamble' to *The Sorrow and the Pity*, was described by *Le Monde* as 'brilliant, nervous, biting'; it remains locked away in the vaults of the French television network. The critic John Simon described *America Revisited* (1971), Ophuls' documentary about the state of the United States, as 'a marvellous movie that tells us a great deal about the polarisation of America.' Yet it, too, is almost never seen. Finally, *A Sense of Loss* (1972), despite very good reviews, has had slim audiences in the United States and so far no distribution whatsoever in Britain. On balance, it should be noted, this film about Ulster is anti-British, though it is also opposed to the Provisional IRA. Since this interview, Ophuls has begun work on a new documentary, *The Memory of Justice*. 'Another of those four-hour plunges into everyone's guilty consciences, this time about Nuremberg trials, war crimes, Vietnam, Algeria and the rest of the bloody hopeless mess.'

The son of the director Max Ophuls, he is himself a man of fragments: half Jewish, born in Germany, French childhood, Hollywood adolescence, then a career in French and German films and television. 'The pieces are a neurosis of my entire family, the result of several emigrations.'

How do you compare *The Sorrow and the Pity* and *A Sense of Loss*?

MARCEL OPHULS: Well, if you come up with something attractive or successful, then you know that the film which comes after is going to be compared with it. You can't avoid that. But I think that *A Sense of Loss* doesn't stack up to *The Sorrow and the Pity* for several reasons, some of them my fault and some not. I was very much aware in Belfast of being part of the spectator trade, the journalistic-tourism trade. I've come to believe more and more that for the type of work I'm involved in the research and the homework and the classic journalistic approach are not enough. You have to have some autobiographical research to go along with it. The thing that you should be able to draw on, for the film to become real and personal and committed, is something which touches upon your personal life. That is the case with *America Revisited*, which I like better than either of the other two. Obviously the structure there is based entirely upon the mixture of politics and autobiography. That is apparent also in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, but it's entirely lacking in *A Sense of Loss*.

The Sorrow and the Pity has other advantages. My films are predicated on the discipline of not using commentary but using only what people tell you, relying on what they tell you. The idea is that you rush around to thirty or forty people in different towns, trying to create epic frescoes on the basis of straight interviewing. I don't

believe in going to live with one family for several weeks. I'm an impatient man, and I don't believe in intellectual striptease, that your films should try to serve as a means for psychoanalysing people for the benefit of the general public.

And people who have had thirty years to reflect are perhaps going to be more interesting than people who are right in the middle of a situation, who will give you a lot of

'The Sorrow and the Pity'



clichés and rhetoric. However, the recipe will not work every time. It has a lot to do with the question of what mood people are in. By that, I mean the political mood. It is very significant that *The Sorrow and the Pity* was made six months after 1968, when the middle-aged—and this is a film about the middle-aged French bourgeoisie—were caught off base, and therefore were more likely to be self-critical. The primary virtue of the French is not self-criticism, and this film is self-critical. It was an exceptional situation.

What was your aim in *The Sorrow and the Pity*?

To analyse four years of collective destiny.

And what did you conclude?

With what is an obsession of mine, the pedagogical message that I repeat and repeat, that daily individual life and politics cannot be separated. I know that by showing that there were fascists in France, people who committed atrocities and collaborated with the Germans, I am giving a vicarious thrill to a bunch of old Nazis. But on balance

that's all right. They are dying out, and Willy Brandt is Chancellor of Germany now. There's a new book out about Vichy, by Robert Paxton, which bears out some of the blackness of the nation's reaction.

Did you have some strong reaction against people like Christian de la Mazière, who admitted in the film that he not only had collaborated but had joined the French section of the SS?

No, I don't think so. The purpose of having Anthony Eden in the film is to make that statement at the end, that those who haven't been through it shouldn't—can't—make judgments on it. And that applies to generations as well as to countries.

Yet didn't you manipulate the situation in order to have that stout ex-German officer during the wedding recalling his pleasant times in France?

There are sixty-two meanings of manipulation. I will tell you what happened. I had put an advertisement in the paper for German soldiers who had served in France, and he rang me up. I was almost ready to leave Hamburg, and we couldn't settle on a date. Finally, I asked about one day, and he said no, his daughter was getting married. Well, there I manipulated him, manoeuvred, so that we could film at the wedding. You can see that his daughter and son-in-law squirmed during it.

You have also been criticised for not having more women in the film. Why not?

I don't know. One answer is that I don't like quotas. Another reason is that France, certainly the France of that time, was a traditional country. There's a woman, a Resistance heroine, talked about in the film, but she is dead, tortured to death. But *The Sorrow and the Pity*, as Pauline Kael pointed out, is a film about individual choice in times of great political crisis. Where does resistance start? Why do some people do opportune things? When and what is an act of individual heroism? These are difficult questions, but the women did not really confront them. It was permissible at the time for women to stay at home.

Yet you suggested the fate of collaborators during the Liberation through that of one woman?

That was a show biz device. They stripped

women, shaved their heads and paraded them through the streets—it's particularly shocking, that's all. But the women hang around in the background even now; you see that where the peasants are sitting around drinking, and the woman who obviously wears the pants in the family stands back. And if in the interviews I had tried to chance the psychological or sociological situation, I would have wound up with nothing at all. But if you see the Irish film, you see that women there have a much greater role.

How did you devise the technique?

Ah, successful films, or films that are considered to be successful, or new or fresh, are usually based on some sort of lucky accident. You don't decide to be new or original. I don't particularly like Bresson's films, but I do like his definition of originality—to be original is to try to do the same things that everybody else does, and fail.

Does this mean that you have no idea what you're doing?

No, but I'm second generation Hollywood, and I do believe that films are made in the cutting-room. I'm rather a fanatic about that, and it's the one link I have with the purists of the documentary ethic. I don't share many of their points of view, but I do agree with them on the matter of scripting; which puts me in disagreement with the television documentary, where you go to see an economics professor and he makes a point about the government's economic policy. Of course, this is very important, but it doesn't have much to do with—to use a big word—'art'. And I hope that I have something to do with art.

So there is a discipline of post-structuring, of letting yourself be surprised, of then using that surprise and communicating it to the audience. What people, and lazy film students, don't realise is that this is a discipline. They think it is just a recipe for not thinking things out beforehand and for going around with a camera, having a lot of fun and seeing what you turn up with. Well, that's not it, because if you are going to do things professionally, the strain is very hard. Because the cameraman wants to know, the producer wants to know, the

people you go to see want to know where you're going to place this, what you are going to do with that, is it going to land up on the cutting-room floor. To put off the moment of decision is a discipline which you impose on yourself. It's an anxiety-ridden situation. And this does not mean that you have no structural ideas beforehand. There should be some connection between general ideas and structural ideas, between form and content.

What general idea were you working with in *A Sense of Loss*?

The general idea in Belfast was of going from death back to life. It's a reaction against the spaghetti Western, roughly speaking. It's an old, Middle Ages, humanistic, social democratic attempt to give people an idea that life after all is not all that cheap. A banal idea perhaps, but the idea that you only live once unless you happen to believe in reincarnation. So whatever you are going to miss, you are going to miss forever. That is why it's called *A Sense of Loss*.

If, as you have said, that film lacked 'autobiographical research', how did you try to make up for it? What did you do when you first got to Belfast?

The factual answer is that I went into hospital for an operation. Which was very funny in a way, because the surgeons were confronted with a very minor thing that was painful and had to be taken care of, and the rest of the day they were sewing arms back on and putting people's guts back inside. It was a contrast of the tourist-spectator.

And then what?

The fact was that I had done my homework, but I wasn't really committed or involved; and so the way I tried to get around that was with the structure of the film—that I started with death and went back to life. We did something ghoulish, very ghoulish, at first: ambulance chasing. We actually had ambulance drivers who promised to contact us, policemen, and people on the other side, who said they would call us. Nine times out of ten, they didn't, because they had more urgent things to worry about than a camera crew. But sometimes it worked out. Our aim was to catch death while it was still there. The system, then, was to wait for a few weeks. Then Anna Carrigan—because she's Irish—would contact the family, and I would go in a few weeks after the funeral and talk with the members of the family, asking them who were these people that had died, what were they trying to do in their lives. There were four deaths, and they were all very different people. One death is missing, and that's a British soldier. We tried for weeks, but the Ministry of Defence said no. I think it was very foolish on their part. It would have given balance.

In a situation like that, what was the first thing you would say to a family?

I have a selective memory, like most people, and it was so intensely embarrassing that I've forgotten. I couldn't tell you. I must have mumbled something about how sorry I was.

Were there people who wouldn't be interviewed?

Any time you do a film like that, there are people who for their own good reasons want no part of it. In Ireland, however, the number willing to communicate was higher than average. All sides, I think, wanted to

'*A Sense of Loss*'



get their message out to the world. The most reluctant were the Protestants, because they are used to being used by foreign television crews—and in some senses, rightly so—as the fall guys. But it's funny that in Belfast it is in some ways hard to find someone who hasn't been interviewed before.

I noticed that you didn't interview any members of the Provisional IRA . . .

In truth, I was not all that anxious to interview the Provisionals. I wish I could tell you why. I think I have a great reticence towards people who use revolutionary ideology in the cause of nationalism, and who mix up these things. Maybe it goes deeper than that. I didn't want to sit down and have civilised talks with people when I knew that, in two or three days, I would be talking to their victims. That has a lot to do with it. Yet I'm surprised, because in the few places in America where *A Sense of Loss* has been playing, the Provisionals come in and identify with the film. They hand out leaflets in the lobby. Yet there's not one moment in the film where there is any rationale for their activities.



'A Sense of Loss'

How did you get into documentaries?

Quite by accident. My training and my tastes are very classical. Like many French directors, I have a great admiration for the products of the Hollywood system, and my first film *Peau de Banane* reflects that—probably too much.

When did you start in films?

In 1951, as a third assistant director at about ten dollars a week. Later, I extracted a promise from my father that if I made the grade he would take me as one of the four assistants on *Lola Montès*—this in spite of his great aversion to nepotism. I passed the grade. I don't think it was just because he was my father, but he was a fantastically interesting man to work for. But *Lola Montès* was one of the legendary flops in French film history, and I had a lot of trouble then in finding a job. I worked in Baden-Baden for three years for German radio and television. Then I came back to Paris and was unemployed just when Truffaut and the boys made the first breakthrough. I would walk down the Champs-Élysées looking for faces to talk to, and I would see François surrounded by a court, a retinue, asking him things like 'how do you make films?' I would go home and my wife would ask if I had talked to him, and I would say no. You see, I had met him a few years before when my father telephoned to say that these 'intellectuals' were coming

to talk to him for some sort of film magazine—*Cahiers du Cinéma*.

Finally, I did talk to him on the street, and a great friendship started. Producers then, with the New Wave, wanted new directors to make first films; and François, I understand, had a little book with six or seven names, among them mine. Godard was on that list too. First there was *L'Amour à Vingt Ans*. François did a French sketch and I did a German sketch. It was autobiographical, about how I met my wife and fell in love with her after our child was born, when I went to visit her at the maternity clinic on a kind of courtesy call. François' sketch was better. François introduced me to Jeanne Moreau, and she paid for the literary rights to *Peau de Banane*. And the film proved a financial success and got good reviews.

Then why didn't you continue in that vein?

We planned to. We planned another comedy with Jeanne and Belmondo, with this American idea of the couple who clicked, two people who were equivalent in age and charisma. But there were difficulties, and I did a stopgap measure, *Faites vos Jeux, Mesdames*. Stopgap measures in this business are very dangerous. That broke my neck. It was very, very bad, and after that people wrote me off. They said that *Peau de Banane* had only been a lucky accident. Then there was the episode of the musical version of *Till Eulenspiegel*, in a Czech castle, and I walked off the set after four weeks. That was another very black period. But one day I was talking at dinner to people from ORTF, the French network. We were talking about the Gaullist monopoly of television and so forth, but I admitted that there was one thing I liked, a monthly magazine called *Zoom*, which was more modern. I met the people from it, we clicked, and for three years I was a French television journalist.

It was then that you made the Munich film?

Yes. *Munich* was another part of the same story as *The Sorrow and the Pity*. It was shown twice on French television, very successfully. But Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister of the Munich agreement, who in history is one of the main appeasers, had given us an interview which was very self-righteous. Seemingly, he did not want it to be shown again. After the success of *The Sorrow and the Pity*, an association of Parisian journalists wanted to put on a benefit showing of *Munich*, but an ORTF official said, 'If you think we are going to show that bastard's film again, you're very much mistaken.'

Are you now going to make another documentary?

I just spent a year preparing a follow-up to *The Sorrow and the Pity*, about the first two years after the war in France and Germany. There was a chance then to change society completely. In one country the bourgeoisie had been completely compromised by Nazism; and in the other, because of collaboration, it was very much on the defensive. How did they recuperate? This is fascinating. The film was taking a long time to set up. . . You see, while documentaries are dirt cheap compared to fiction features, mine are still very expensive in comparison with the average television

documentary. *A Sense of Loss* cost \$210,000. So I am at the upward ceiling of the rentability of documentary films, and that means arranging to sell to television in some countries, and to art circuits in other countries. It's all very tenuous. Anyhow, it was taking a long time. And then I just learned that the producers of *The Sorrow and the Pity* had used the method not for a film on de Gaulle, which I had thought they were going to do, but for a film on this subject. And my project is stalled.

You would think there would be people waiting to offer you money.

I've been told time and time again that I don't sell myself very well. I believe it. I antagonise people. First, this has to do with the sins of the father, though in this case not the sins. I learned something from my father which is not very modern: that the director should be a salaried person, in order not to fall into connivance with the money people. Because one of his jobs should be to fight for the maximum time, the best actors, the best sets. I still keep to this old-fashioned view, and producers sense it. Yet I don't find it any easier to work with the television bureaucracies, where the officials are scared of making decisions. Of the two, I prefer the commercial producers. I'm not a cineaste *maudit*. I do not want to be a poet of the camera in his corner.

You're going to be teaching at Princeton University in the spring?

I will give one course about comedies in the 1930s and 40s, which we'll call 'White Telephones and Dark Forebodings', if they'll let me. Mostly Lubitsch, Capra, Cukor and Preston Sturges. The reason for this choice is twofold—because it will be a change from those goddamn, bloodsucking documentary marathons I've boxed myself into, and because I'm an old reactionary at heart and these are my favourite films. Quite selfish, you see!

If there were a choice between making another *Sorrow and the Pity* or making something else, which would you choose?

Something else. Another reason for my particular problem is that I'm still attracted to what I started out to do. *Peau de Banane* has been forgotten. Yet I still think that comedies are a peculiarly modern and attractive form of expression. I would like to get back into that, though I think I would have difficulty adjusting back to this very artificial world, because I've met people who are real people, and people in the movie world are not all that real. You have to cope with a lot of dullness. Even knowing all this, I'd like to get back to it.

I once read, many years ago, what happened during the Siege of Madrid at the end of the Spanish Civil War, when people were being bombed, were hungry, knew that they were losing, that husbands would be jailed, that Franco would inevitably win. In those very last days, they kept rushing to see American movies with Cary Grant, the Marx Brothers and so on. This always made me think that would be really an ideal way to spend a life in movies. One year, to be able to make films about the Siege of Madrid, because there are always Sieges of Madrid going on somewhere. Then the year after, give food to the people who are in the siege, so that they can escape: Fred Astaire and Cary Grant, or whoever are their modern equivalents. ■

IN THE PICTURE

End of the Lion

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is getting out of film distribution and cutting right back on the production of films. The news has the same shock impact as the bankruptcy of Rolls-Royce. MGM is the leading brand name in the movie business.

At the press conference in mid-September 1973 announcing the sad finale, Mr. James Aubrey, who was installed as president of MGM four years ago, said: 'The bottom has fallen out of the market. Television has captured the mass entertainment market. Movies have become a specialised field of attraction and audiences have become more selective . . . MGM will henceforth produce only a limited number of "highly selective" quality films.'

Two years ago Mr. Aubrey told New York financial analysts that, 'It is possible to make an operating profit without a tremendous hit, and this proves that the motion picture industry is a business that can work if it's run like a business rather than as an art form.' The businessman then outlined plans to turn out 24 pictures a year, including reissues, at an average budget of \$2m. Subjects would be chosen based on their contemporary or permissive qualities.

In the first year of the Aubrey regime, MGM did not have a single picture in the commercial top 20; in 1971 it had *Shaft*, something of a fluke, and *Ryan's Daughter*, which had been set up years earlier. In 1972, it had a box office success in *Skyjacked*, which showed people how to hijack aeroplanes. That record, three films out of 60, is less than any of the other majors.

Aubrey is the man credited with putting the CBS television network at the top of the ratings table. He was introduced to MGM as the cool-headed, hard businessman who would bring in

the modern production line techniques of television and cut out the expensive flab of Hollywood. Upon his arrival, any project for which more than \$600,000 development money had been spent was chopped. The gap between shooting and showing a film was going to be brought right down, to four months in some cases. The accent was to be on youth pictures. *Zabriskie Point*, one of the few projects inherited from the previous management, was taken up by Aubrey and heavily promoted. It finally cost double the \$3m budget, but Youth stayed away. *The Strawberry Statement*, heavy-footed on the side of the angels and young radicals, was a flop. Aubrey's hard attitude to independent producers made them reluctant to peddle their packages to MGM. They went to the other majors instead. However, Aubrey did beef up the television side of MGM, the very necessary bread and butter made-for-TV features and series that are shown endlessly on network television and then are syndicated to other stations. MGM has four series on network television, and has set up a series of what should be good deals. Aubrey does know his television market.

Aubrey has now resigned from what is left of MGM, almost four years to the day after he accepted the job from Kirk Kerkorian. Some say Aubrey left because he had done the job he had been asked to do: sell off anything saleable, chop out anything unprofitable, and keep the rest going on a cheapie basis. But the way MGM sold off its patrimony was hardly brilliant. The studios in Boreham Wood, 122 acres of prime real estate within limousine distance of London, went for £2m, a transaction that the *Financial Times* reckoned would probably rank as the property bargain of the year. The overseas bits of the profitable

music publishing company were sold off. Saddest of all for nostalgophiles (as *Variety* calls buffs with dewy eyes), the props were sold off for \$14m to a firm of auctioneers, who are thought to have sold them on for some \$10m. The distribution organisation was pruned dramatically, and at some loss of effectiveness in pushing MGM films. Overseas distribution was streamlined by finding local partners, such as EMI in Britain, with a resulting potpourri of foreign associates. The alternative, so far successful, of merging foreign distribution with another major, such as Paramount with Universal into Cinema International Corporation, or Columbia-Warner, was rejected.

All the ruthless pruning and chopping did stem the red ink. In the year to August, 1969, MGM lost \$35m. In 1970, it lost \$8m, but has stayed profitable until recently. In the 1950s and the 1960s MGM suffered from a series of battles as one group after another fought to gain control of MGM and unlock what were thought to be its priceless assets, in the form of real estate and the reel estate of its films. Kirk Kerkorian was the latest in the long line, and by the simple expedient of offering shareholders a lot of money for their shares, bought a 30 per cent stake in the company in 1969, which has since been raised to 49 per cent.

Kerkorian bought the first blocks of shares at \$35 and \$42 a go, and by now has spent over \$100m buying half the company. The share price is now around \$17, which means that the whole company is valued on Wall Street for what he paid for half of it. Aubrey stemmed the losses, but to a large extent by pushing out many of the old faithfuls like *Gone with the Wind* and *Doctor*

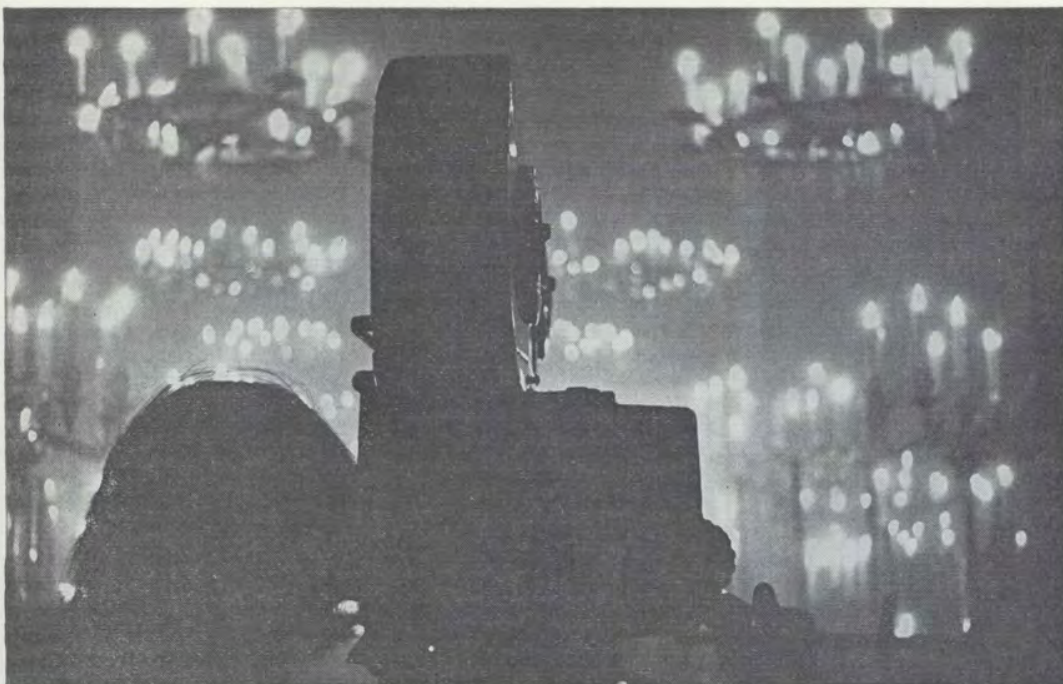
Zhivago, and economising on making new films. So the debts were cleared off, but the company was gradually shut down, and at the end of the day Kerkorian was left with a library of films, and a distribution organisation without enough good films to distribute.

So the Lion was put to sleep. The distribution organisation is being wound up. The library of films is being given to competitors to distribute. United Artists has paid \$15m for some music interests and for the right to distribute MGM's films theatrically in the United States for the next ten years, albeit at a reduced distribution fee of 20 per cent. This means that United Artists salesmen have a terrific addition to the package offered to cinema exhibitors. MGM will still get any profit from the reissues left over after the costs of prints and advertising and United Artists' fees have been met. A similar deal has been made for overseas sales with Cinema International Corporation, who also get 37 MGM cinemas throughout the world—including the Empire and the Ritz (which EMI were hoping to acquire). MGM retains the network television sales proceeds for the film library. When MGM sold Boreham Wood, it began sharing the operating expenses of Elstree with EMI; it has pulled out of that arrangement, leaving the future of Elstree uncertain.

Although the studio says it will still make feature films, MGM is now little more than a name on a hotel. Kerkorian, a Las Vegas casino and hotel operator, sensibly wanted MGM to diversify. But the diversification is in one giant basket full of eggs, the 2,000 bedroom MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. It opened with a showbiz variety offering on stage called 'Hollywood, Hollywood'.

Gayle Hunnicutt, Josephine Chaplin in Franju's 'L'Homme sans Visage'





'The Abdication': Queen Christina (Liv Ullmann) by candlelight.

But the story is full of ironies. Remember the last time a movie major went out of the movie business? It was RKO, run into the ground by the Las Vegas hotel and gambling entrepreneur Howard Hughes. And the move into hotels is ironic. When the Justice Department severed cinema-owning from production and distribution, Loew's Inc., MGM's parent, took the cinemas. And diversified into hotels. Now, too, the Lion is bedridden.

DAVID GORDON

The Abdication

Garbo and Mamoulian have probably fixed for all time a movie image of Sweden's cantankerous Queen Christina. The enigmatic romantic heroine sails away into exile; and the story ends. There is no room in that context for the protracted epilogue, the long years

in Rome in which Christina argued, intrigued, collected art treasures, confirmed her reputation for intellectual independence, and grew, it would seem, to look more and more like an obdurate, dumptily peevish Queen Victoria.

Anthony Harvey's *The Abdication* begins, as it were, where Garbo's Christina sailed into screen history. It's based on what was originally a two-character play by the American Ruth Wolff, put on at the 1971 Bath Festival and dealing with the first confrontation between papal authority and autocratic royal personality. Arriving in Rome, expecting that the Vatican would give an enthusiastic welcome to one of its more spectacular converts, Christina instead found herself facing a fairly stiff interrogation by Cardinal Azzolino, appointed for the occasion as a kind of spiritual immigration officer. 'One of the Vatican's Flying Squadron,' is Harvey's description of the sophis-

ticated 17th-century Cardinal, who was to become one of Christina's entourage.

The play remains unproduced in London (Gemma Jones played Christina at Bath, to David Neal's Azzolino), but the producer Robert Fryer snapped it up, in the wake of *Travels With My Aunt*, and encouraged Mrs. Wolff to write her own screenplay. She has since, says Tony Harvey, written another play about another obstreperous monarch—Eleanor of Aquitaine, heroine of Harvey's earlier *Lion in Winter*. And Harvey himself comes to *The Abdication* via an abortive attempt to set up a film about a third difficult royal lady, Isabella of Spain.

After that project fell through, Harvey made *The Glass Menagerie*, with Katharine Hepburn playing the part taken by Gertrude Lawrence in the first screen version. He began *The Abdication* in Sweden last March, broke off production for four months while

his Christina, Liv Ullmann, nipped back to Hollywood to co-star with Gene Hackman in *Zandy's Bride* and he himself worked on *The Glass Menagerie*, and reassembled the crew last July at Pinewood. They were heading on for Italian locations; but had found that several Roman scenes, including the interrogation room itself and the arrival of Christina's party outside the Vatican wall, could be reconstructed more cheaply and easily on the Pinewood lot.

On the day we went down, Peter Finch, playing Azzolino, had just reported for duty. The play now expands into flashback, from the original duologue, and the cast has grown to a full complement of royal relations, instructors (Cyril Cusack plays Oxenstierna) and retainers. But the core is still Christina's impetuous arrival, hurrying on in riding clothes ahead of her retinue, and Azzolino's hours of cross-questioning. Liv Ullmann, in a dusty jerkin, confronts Peter Finch, splendid from top to toe in cardinal's scarlet, except when a twitch of the cloak reveals a 20th-century trouser leg. Liv Ullmann was pacing about, eating a bacon sandwich and muttering to herself 'ride my horses through your crypts', a line liable to tax anyone speaking less than perfect English. (In fact, she survived 'crypts' with easy aplomb.) Finch's dresser scurried in to fit the Cardinal's scarlet boots. In the small, cool set, built as a little pavilion-like structure in the Pinewood grounds, with pale pastel frescoes on the walls, the atmosphere was relaxed, concentrated and as quiet as it could be, in view of the regular droning reminders of how near Pinewood is to Heathrow.

Tony Harvey has no great liking for studios, and on *Lion in Winter* the castle rooms had a thick-walled authenticity lacking in Pinewood's persuasive plasterboard. His style in action is unobtrusively alert; and after *Dutchman*, *Lion in Winter* and *They Might Be Giants*, he has established himself, among other things, as a director for the subtleties of performance by star players working in confined settings. On another day, we watched him shooting something on a bigger scale, the abdication scene itself.

This was done on one of the big Pinewood stages, lit entirely by candlelight. (One thousand candles? Two thousand candles? Estimates varied according to the informant.) There were candles on stands; candles on candelabra; candles dripping; candles stationary; candles clutched by black-hooded extras who had to step smartly out of the way as the forward-tracking camera bore down on them. The haze was heavily thickened by lavish outpourings of acrid smoke. Geoffrey Unsworth, the lighting cameraman, is carrying further the smoky effects of *Cabaret*; and in fact smoke is being used throughout the flashbacks. Visually, the film will contrast the warm, dazzling Italian light of

Christina's exile with the chilly haze of all her Swedish memories.

Press photographers at lunch had shown up heavily spattered with candle grease. By afternoon, however, the logistics of setting up this elaborate shot had been organised, and the camera, starting its track high up and moving slowly down as it was pushed forward on its truck, advanced smoothly along its flarepath of candles. As the camera moved towards the throne, at the end of the long set, lights came on to spotlight the crown and the stripped, white, distant face of the queen. After resigning the crown to her cousin, Charles X, she's to walk from the Pinewood throne, through the palace corridors, out into the Swedish snow of a scene shot last winter.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Stavisky

Since the beginning of October, Alain Resnais has been shooting *Stavisky*, his first feature since *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968). 'When Jorge Semprun first spoke to me about making a film on Stavisky,' Resnais said recently, 'I admitted to him that at the age of twelve, in the Musée Grévin, I stood dreaming before the wax figure of this character, whom I compared to an Arsène Lupin swindling the rich and helping the poor.'

Actually, Serge Alexandre Stavisky (born in Russia as Sacha) was a swindler who sold 40 million francs' worth of valueless bonds to French workers, but he moved about in high circles. In spite of a shady past, he was generally known in the early 1930s as a respectable financier with first-rate political connections, associated with the municipal pawnshop of Bayonne. When his fraud was discovered in December 1933, he promptly fled, and the police caught up with him in Chamonix the following month. According to official history, he either committed suicide or was murdered by the police, although the latter explanation appears the likelier one: the Paris press rather implausibly reported that he fired two bullets into his head. The revelation of his crime resulted in the downfall of two ministries. The Radical Socialist premier Camille Chautemps was forced to resign after right and left extremists accused him of crooked deals with Stavisky; then his successor Daladier also had to step down after using force to repress the bloody riots staged by extremists (mainly royalists) in February 1934.

All this plus Jorge Semprun seems to add up to a 'timely' political thriller, but Resnais has indicated that he has something a bit different in mind. 'It's the legend of Stavisky that we're going to film: the fiction and even the fantasy taking precedence over the authenticity. I don't believe in historical films. One hopes, however, to be sensitive to the flavour of a period... [I'm not] trying to

make an apology for Stavisky, but it appears that the man had charm.' Or as Semprun puts it, 'The mood will be more Lubitsch than Losey.'

Or will it be a matter of Minnelli overtaking Trotsky? Stephen Sondheim, who composed the lyrics to *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, and the music and lyrics of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, is supplying *Stavisky's* score. Trotsky (Yves Peneau) figures briefly in the action when Stavisky is introduced to him and his family in Barbizon. He also meets Herna Wolfgang (Sylvia Bodesco), a young woman who facilitates the encounter and whom Stavisky (Jean-Paul Belmondo) promises to give an audition to at the Empire, his theatre in Paris. (The film's original working title was *L'Empire d'Alexandre*.)

Last November, Resnais and his crew were filming some scenes set in the Empire a few blocks north of the Opéra at Théâtre Mogador, which was concurrently presenting an operetta called *Douchka*. The brief part of the shooting that I watched was taking place on the stage, where Resnais was unobtrusively 'conducting' a rapid tracking shot that moved diagonally across about half of the stage's length, accompanying Alexandre and Herna while they exchanged a few lines. Behind them was a quaint Russian backdrop, apparently a fixture of *Douchka*, although one couldn't tell how sharply the Panavision camera kept this in focus as it sped across the planks. Belmondo—who is essentially financing this French-Italian production by furnishing 80% of the budget—was dressed in a snappy grey-striped suit with a red carnation; Bodesco wore a more modest 1930s frock. The elated mood on the set, visible in members of the cast and crew, appeared to be equally relaxed and controlled, and Resnais' multiple activities—as he squinted through his viewfinder, checked something in the script, counselled the actors, looked through the camera lens for each set-up, or simply stood watching—were so calmly ubiquitous that they often had the effect of seeming invisible.

Other members of the cast include Charles Boyer as Baron Raoul, François Périer as Borelli, Anny Duperey as Stavisky's wife, and Michel Lonsdale and Claude Rich in smaller parts. Having already shot sequences in Biarritz and Barbizon, the crew was planning to continue at a studio outside Paris before concluding at Chamonix in mid-January, roughly one year after Semprun and Resnais began work on the script. The film is expected to run about 135 minutes and will be released in the spring, probably in time for the Cannes Festival.

Will the film have an experimental side? 'Not in its overall structure,' Semprun tells me when I ring him up. (As is customary with Resnais, the scriptwriter stays away from the shooting.)

'In Resnais' treatment of the period, yes, I suspect so. The construction is relatively simple.' How will the chronology be handled? No flashbacks; one flash forward to the death of Montalvo (Robert Bisacco), a rich Spanish friend of Stavisky's; the rest chronological, beginning in July 1933 and ending with Stavisky's death the following January.

Is it relevant, one wonders, that only five or six months after the latter date, Resnais first encountered 'Harry Dickson, the American Sherlock Holmes' at the newspaper kiosk of Vannes railway station? (Cf. Francis Lacassin's article in the Autumn 1973 *SIGHT AND SOUND*.) Is it possible that some of the ambience of Resnais' dream project may have found its way into *L'affaire Stavisky*? At some point between the 40th anniversary of Stavisky's death and the 40th anniversary of Resnais' childhood discovery, we should have some sort of basis for an answer.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

In the American Grain

Can it be that that last citadel of conservatism, American film criticism, is finally falling into auteurism? Even if the philosophy is still suspect, it certainly looks as though some of the individual value-judgments have filtered through. To judge, at least, by the results of a poll recently taken by Los Angeles Filmex in order to put together a season of films this winter at the County Museum of Art as a stopgap while we are

waiting for the festival proper to emerge again next spring. They asked forty American critics to choose their hot favourites for the title of the greatest American film of all time. All the national and New York critics were included, all the Los Angeles critics, and a handful of film historians such as Peter Bogdanovich, Manny Farber, Parker Tyler and Willard Van Dyke. *Rolling Stone* and *Penthouse* rub shoulders with the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*.

And the results are partly predictable, partly strange. The winner, ten votes ahead of its nearest rival, *Intolerance*, is (surprise, surprise) *Citizen Kane*. *Intolerance* is followed by *The Gold Rush* and *Birth of a Nation* (12 votes each), *Greed* and *Sunrise* (11 votes) and *City Lights* and *The Maltese Falcon* (10 votes). *Sunrise* is a little surprising in this context; until very recently it might be regarded as one of the masterpieces of American cinema by European critics, but was hardly up there with Griffith, Chaplin and Stroheim for Americans. One might guess that the recent arrival of Lotte Eisner's book about Murnau on the desks of many of the voters (it has been receiving a gratifying amount of review coverage here, even outside the specialised film press) had something to do with it. More surprising, though, is to find in next place, with nine votes, *Vertigo*. How times do change. That this, the auteurist's delight among Hitchcock films but given only very qualified approval by the critical establishment on its first appearance, should now come so high up a list of this kind, sharing ninth place with *The Grapes of Wrath*

Jean-Paul Belmondo as Stavisky



and *The General*, is a real turn-up for the books.

The only other Hitchcock film which figures in the top 52 (three votes or more) is *Psycho*, with five. Keaton is now level-pegging with Chaplin (they both have three films in the list), and Hawks comes in alongside Huston, Welles and Kubrick, all of them represented by three films (the third Welles film is *Touch of Evil*). Only one musical in the lot, *Singin' in the Rain*, with seven votes. One Sternberg (*Morocco*), one Sturges (*Sullivan's Travels*), one Capra (*It Happened One Night*). No Minnelli, no Cukor, no underground of any sort. But way ahead of everyone in terms of films listed is Ford, with no fewer than seven films included, whereas the most anyone else has is three. Obviously Ford is where the auteurs and the traditionalists meet, and the combination is unbeatable.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

'99 and 44/100% Dead

'Your past does catch up with you,' says John Frankenheimer, on the set of his new film *'99 and 44/100% Dead*, a tongue-in-cheek treatment of gang war, starring Richard Harris. After this, Frankenheimer will direct *The French Connection II*, in which Gene Hackman goes to Marseilles to confront Alain Delon, playing the kingpin of the drug connection. 'What I need, to put it bluntly, are two commercial successes back to back, and I hope these prove to be the two.'

'99 and 44/100% Dead (a pun on Ivory Soap's '99 and 44/100% pure' publicity slogan) is Frankenheimer's seventeenth picture. 'It's the same kind of movie as *The Manchurian Candidate*,' he says.

'The style deals in the absurd. The first time I read Robert Dillon's original script I didn't want to do it because I was used to reading screenplays seriously. Then I realised it was neither comedy nor satire and that it simply demanded something a bit bigger than life. It's like a Howard Hawks Western rewritten for the city.'

The Manchurian Candidate and *Seven Days in May* have remained Frankenheimer's most celebrated films. Situated in a kind of never-never-land between science fiction and political thriller, *The Manchurian Candidate* dealt with brainwashing. *Seven Days in May*, filmed in 1963, the year of Kennedy's assassination, told of a right-wing political coup in Washington. Inevitably, I asked Frankenheimer whether he now felt like doing another political film. 'How could you?' he said. 'What's happening in Washington makes *Seven Days in May* look like a Bugs Bunny cartoon strip. I mean, who could invent Nixon; what screenwriter could have dreamed up Watergate? And God knows we haven't seen the third act yet.'

Frankenheimer admits that he is a cynic, and says that his three years in France (during which he made the somewhat unhappy, so far unreleased *Impossible Object*) left him in a depressed state. 'Film lovers are so many Alices in Wonderland,' he says. 'François Truffaut is the only younger director in France with talent and a line of progression—although to say that in movie circles in Paris is courting banishment to a kind of Siberia.' And he has little cheerful to say about the movie industry. 'Directors who say films are an art have either been extremely lucky or they are utter fools. Costs are spiralling, technicians and crews continue their head-in-the-

sand attitude that if they worked this week they will also work next week. It's economic suicide to sell features to TV only a year or two after their theatrical openings. Here in Hollywood, the only jobs left—week-to-week jobs, I mean—are in TV or in films made expressly for the little screen. And television is becoming too good. Look, French TV is the world's worst and people in France still go to the movies. In England and Germany television is excellent and there are only porno flicks left in the cinemas.'

Frankenheimer's latest is *The Iceman Cometh*, for American Film Theatre's novel subscription series—a film four hours long, and in the AFT release blessed with two intermissions. The entire action, as in Eugene O'Neill's original, takes place in Harry Hope's Saloon, a flea-bitten, depressing hole-in-the-wall in Greenwich Village, circa 1912. There are sixteen principal characters, all alcoholic derelicts, each with two stories—illusions and the truth. 'I had majored in English at Williams and more specifically in American drama, and had done an honours thesis on O'Neill and knew all the difficulties of *Iceman*,' Frankenheimer says. 'But I hadn't read it in twenty years; and I thought, well, I'm only going to get the opportunity to do this once, and if I don't do it someone else will. I thought I really ought to take a shot at it.'

Frankenheimer feels there are only two genres of films that the public now will really want to see: high romantic films (perhaps *The Great Gatsby*) and adventure capers. 'Most people are tired of pornography and excessive violence.' He thinks it's more difficult to get a film off the ground today than it was ten years ago, and knows of instances where directors



John Frankenheimer

were forced to put up their own salaries as a completion guarantee. He admires Peter Bogdanovich for having three commercial hits in a row, but thinks no one can go on stealing the past. '*What's Up, Doc?*' was a Howard Hawks screwball comedy; *Paper Moon* a Shirley Temple.'

'I also know that, unlike TV directors, we carry our past with us. Features always follow you. They keep turning up at the most unexpected moments, especially the bad ones. You can't escape your past. Yet I think there is a kind of justice and that the good guys do win.'

AXEL MADSEN

Cinematograph and Indecent Displays

The Home Secretary would have us believe that his new Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill 'is not concerned with and has nothing to do with censorship.' But some minutes later he does set the record straight by saying that the bill 'resolves some anomalies which have emerged in our system of film censorship.' These anomalies are (a) the exemption of unlicensed club shows from the Obscene Publications Act 1959 and (b) the exemption from licensing (and so censorship) control of commercially run proprietor's film clubs. The bill adopts a tortuous method of plugging these holes. The obscenity law will apply to all film shows except those which are subject to local authority licensing and censorship and those which are not licensable but charge for admission and have local authority permission to advertise. To catch the commercial film clubs, the existing exemptions from licensing control are removed for exhibitions 'promoted for private gain,' a phrase which is given an extremely cryptic explanation in clause 2.

The most dangerous provisions are those in clause 3, which restrict advertising of nearly all unlicensed film shows for which

Karel Reisz with Steven Keats (left) and James Caan at work on 'The Gambler', his first American-made film. Original script by James Toback; not Dostoevsky in Las Vegas



admission charges are made unless local licensing authority permission has been given. Film societies have enough difficulty as it is in fending off attempts by the film trade to prohibit them publicising their programmes. The new rules would add an administrative sanction which could undo much of the benefit of section 5 of the Cinematograph Act 1952, and drag film societies back to their unhappy situation in the 1930s when the big ones at least had to obtain local authority approval for their activities and special exemption from censorship conditions (which was not by any means always given).

Large film societies, like the National Film Theatre, must advertise to the public if they are to gain members. It is not a matter of 'choosing to charge admission to a film and to advertise publicly,' as the Home Office rather loftily puts it. Nor will the conditions to be attached to the permission necessarily be restricted to advertisement matters; if they were, the new principles would be both simpler and more acceptable, and fit in better with part 2 of the bill which deals with displays.

The main consequences of the bill as it stands will be that film societies (except those charging for admission and advertising their programmes to the public) will be covered by the Obscene Publications Act, that advertising of unlicensed shows will be stringently controlled and may bring censorship provisions in by the back door, that commercial film clubs will indeed be brought under censorship control and many non-commercial clubs may be brought in under this heading—and that indecent peep-shows will be banned in public places.

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

1973: Obituary

DECEMBER '72: William Dieterle, German-born Hollywood director, made several of the 30s biography films (*Fog Over Frisco*, *Juarez*); Janet Munro, British actress, elfin Disney starlet who graduated to dramatic roles.

JANUARY: Max Adrian, versatile, fruity-voiced British actor; J. Carrol Naish, swarthy American character actor specialising in nasty foreigners (*Captain Blood*, *Beau Geste*); Edward G. Robinson, art collector; Ludwig Stossel, Austrian-born character actor (*Manhunt*, *Woman of the Year*); Jack MacGowan, lugubrious Irish actor (*The Quiet Man*, *Cul de Sac*) and exponent of Beckett.

FEBRUARY: Tim Holt, who got his comeuppance in *Ambersons* (also *Treasure of Sierra Madre* and many Westerns); Katina Paxinou, resplendent Greek actress, usually larger than life; George Pearson, pioneer British director; Benjamin Frankel, British composer.

MARCH: Carl Benton Reid, American actor (*The Little Foxes*, *Madame X*); C. A. Lejeune, film

critic of the *Observer* 1928-1960; Mikhail Kalatozov, Soviet director of *The Cranes Are Flying*; Cyril Raymond, British actor, Celia Johnson's husband in *Brief Encounter*; Ken Maynard, stalwart silent cowboy; Carmine Gallone, Italian director; Robert Siodmak, director, notably of moody thrillers (*The Spiral Staircase*, *Cry of the City*); Cecil Kellaway, genial character actor, the other ghost in *I Married a Witch*; Noël Coward.

APRIL: Merian Cooper, producer and director (*Chang*, *King Kong*); Robert Armstrong, the human hero of *King Kong*; Ursula Jeans, British actress, usually playing sophisticated ladies; Arthur Freed, song-writer and producer of many of the best musicals; Victor de Kowa, veteran German actor and director.

MAY: Grigori Kozintsev, Russian director, co-founder of FEKS, latterly the best screen director of Shakespeare (*The New Babylon*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*); Lex Barker, the 10th Tarzan, later Old Shatterhand in the Karl May Westerns; Abel Green, editor of *Variety* for forty years; Frances Marion, doyenne of Hollywood scriptwriters in the 20s and 30s (*The Champ*, *Camille*, *Stella Dallas*).

JUNE: Gustav Molander, pioneer Swedish director (*One Night*, *Intermezzo*); Peter Bayliss, British documentary director (*High Journey*, *The Finest Hours*); Arthur P. Jacobs, producer of *Dr. Dolittle*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and the *Planet of the Apes* series; Roger Delgado, British actor, usually cast as suavely sinister Oriental.

JULY: Guy Middleton, British actor specialising in gentleman cads (*Dangerous Moonlight*, *The Captive Heart*); Jack Hawkins, actor (*The Cruel Sea*, *League of Gentlemen*); Lon Chaney Jr., long associated with horror roles, also *Of Mice and Men*, *High Noon*; Willy Fritsch, German star of 30s light opera films; Robert Ryan, ever dependable actor (*Crossfire*, *The Set-Up*, *The Wild Bunch*); Joe E. Brown, rubber-faced American comic, the randy millionaire in *Some Like It Hot*; Veronica Lake, bewitching blonde (*This Gun for Hire*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *I Married a Witch*); George Macready, American actor (*Gilda*, *Knock on Any Door*); Betty Grable, million dollar legs; Fay Holden, actress, Mickey Rooney's mother in the Andy Hardy series; William Inge, playwright and scriptwriter; Ernest Lindgren, founder and curator of the National Film Archive 1935-1973; Bruce Lee, energetic star of the recent wave of kung fu films.

AUGUST: Jean-Pierre Melville, French director, 'father' of the New Wave (*Les Enfants Terribles*, *Léon Morin*, *Prêtre*, *Le Deuxième Souffle*); Warren Duff, scriptwriter (*Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Stage Struck*); Michael Dunn, dwarf actor (*Ship of Fools*, *Boom!*); Douglas Kennedy, veteran character actor.



Robert Ryan in 'Lonelyhearts'; Edward G. Robinson in 'The Woman in the Window'

SEPTEMBER: S. N. Behrman, playwright and scriptwriter (*Queen Christina*, *Cavalcade*, *Quo Vadis*); Betty Field, American actress (*Of Mice and Men*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Picnic*); Nora Nicholson, veteran British actress; Manton Moreland, pop-eyed black actor, usually playing Uncle Tom types; Anna Magnani, Mamma Roma; John Ford, who made Westerns.

OCTOBER: Dennis Price, suave British actor (*Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *Private's Progress*); Crane Wilbur, silent star (*The Perils of Pauline*), producer and director (*House of Wax*); Allan Lane, star of 50s Westerns; Cleo Moore, American actress, often playing blonde bombshells (*Bait*, *On Dangerous Ground*); Sidney Blackmer, American actor, often played businessmen, lawyers, etc. (*Suez*, *Duel in the Sun*, *Rosemary's Baby*).

NOVEMBER: Arturo De Cordova, Mexican actor (*Frenchman's Creek*, *Incendiary Blonde*); Lila Lee, silent star (*Male and Female*, *Blood and Sand*); Marc Allégret, French director (*Fanny*, *Griboville*); Noël Roquevert, veteran French actor, usually as peppery colonel or concierge; B. S. Johnson, British novelist and director of *You're Human Like the Rest of Them*; Sessue Hayakawa, Japanese actor whose career of inscrutability stretched from De Mille's *The Cheat* to *Bridge on the River Kwai*; Constance Talmadge, star of romantic silents and last of the Talmadge sisters; Laurence Harvey, actor of ambition (*Room at the Top*, *The Manchurian Candidate*).

1973: The Top Ten

BLANCHE *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** DON'T LOOK NOW *** JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL *** THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS *** KING, QUEEN, KNAVE *** PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID *** TWO-LANE BLACKTOP *** ULZANA'S RAID
—Richard Combs

THE ADVERSARY *** CRIES AND WHISPERS *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** EMITAI *** THE INVITATION *** JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL *** THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS *** LAST TANGO IN PARIS *** TOUT VA BIEN
—Jan Dawson

BAD COMPANY *** CHARLEY VARRICK *** CRIES AND WHISPERS *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** DON'T LOOK NOW *** THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS *** LAST TANGO IN PARIS *** PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID *** TWO-LANE BLACKTOP
—Philip French

ANDREI RUBLEV *** AVANTI! *** BLANCHE *** CRIES AND WHISPERS *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** DON'T LOOK NOW *** THE INVITATION *** LES NOCES ROUGES *** A PAGE OF MADNESS
—John Gillett

THE ADVERSARY *** ANDREI RUBLEV *** BLANCHE *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** DON'T LOOK NOW *** THE INVITATION *** JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL *** LES NOCES ROUGES *** SOLARIS
—Penelope Houston

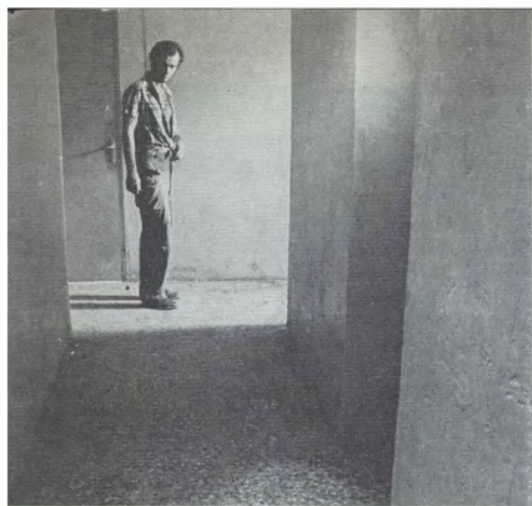
THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID *** JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL *** DON'T LOOK NOW *** THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS *** LES NOCES ROUGES *** CRIES AND WHISPERS *** BLANCHE *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE LONG GOODBYE
—Tom Milne

ACROSS 110th STREET *** THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES *** THE CANTERBURY TALES *** A DOLL'S HOUSE *** GAS! *** INTIMATE CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN *** LETTER TO JANE *** A PAGE OF MADNESS *** RED PSALM *** TOBY DAMMIT (Fellini episode from TALES OF MYSTERY)
—Tony Rayns

BLANCHE *** CRIES AND WHISPERS *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** LAST TANGO IN PARIS *** LES NOCES ROUGES *** PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID *** PEAU D'ANE *** SOLARIS *** TWO-LANE BLACKTOP *** THE WEDDING
—Philip Strick

ANDREI RUBLEV *** CHARLEY VARRICK *** DAY FOR NIGHT *** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE *** JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL *** MINAMATA *** A PAGE OF MADNESS *** RED PSALM *** SOLARIS *** TWO-LANE BLACKTOP
—David Wilson





Scenes from Antonioni's new film,
with Jack Nicholson and Maria
Schneider (above and top left) and
Jenny Runacre (big picture)

PROFESSOR REPORTER



THE ANTONIONI REPORT



Jack Nicholson, Michelangelo Antonioni

Philip Strick

Michelangelo Antonioni and forty Italian technicians had spent eighteen weeks and two-and-a-half million dollars on a new film for MGM by the end of October, 1973. They had been to Munich, Barcelona, Almeria, Malaga, and a dried-up river bed in Algeria. They had driven taxis at full tilt around Russell Square, intercepted Maria Schneider's fury at journalists who only wanted to talk about *Last Tango*, and fought off the Spanish newsmen who had expected to watch another Death Valley orgy in the making. Now they were in London for the final days of shooting, tucked into a tiny studio just off Ladbroke Grove where Ken Russell and Gustav Mahler echoed surprisingly down narrow corridors, where Paul McCartney was having trouble parking his car, and where paint-sprayed announcements on the walls across the street asserted that Princess Anne had already married Valerie Singleton.

The new Antonioni film began life as *Fatal Exit*, an original script by Mark Peploe, who had contributed to *Blow Up* and *Zabriskie Point* and was keen to direct a film for himself. For two years Antonioni had been planning a different subject, *Technically Sweet*, which had involved a number of expeditions up the Amazon, a location assumed to be so hazardous by Carlo Ponti that he finally vetoed the idea and gave Antonioni the Peploe script instead. Antonioni resisted, but the film's budget was too large to be entrusted to an inexperienced director, and besides he was under contract to Ponti for one more film. With some reluctance and barely six weeks' notice, along with a certain amount of confusion over how many of the world's leading actresses would be involved, he set out for Germany with Jack Nicholson and

changed the film's title to *The Reporter*, which everybody liked very much until MGM's legal department pointed out that an American television series under that name already existed. It had now become *Profession: Reporter*, which nobody was too keen on but which has stayed the course.

The story of the film was being kept a secret, not so much because it has some of the elements of a thriller (as, of course, did *Blow Up*) but because it was still liable to be changed. True to form, Antonioni had no wish to be pinned down to a tidy narrative, and any synopsis of the film would have to wait until he had approved the final cut. In broad outline, however, *Profession: Reporter* concerns a world-weary television journalist (Nicholson) on an assignment in the battle-strewn African state of Chad, who is given the unexpected opportunity to assume the

identity of a man he closely resembles and then promptly abandons wife (Jenny Runacre) and producer (Ian Hendry) for a series of international adventures. One of these is an affair with Maria Schneider, which spirals into some alarming implications; the personality he has assumed turns out to be answerable for as many problems as the one he has attempted to escape.

It sounds promising, particularly as Antonioni, to general delight, had become increasingly relaxed ('almost cheerful,' said the unit publicist disbelievingly) as the shooting proceeded. There was a feeling that after a sticky start things had gone well, for all that the director had been disinclined to communicate at any length. He had done what was expected of him, certainly: traffic had been halted in Barcelona as he demanded that all tourists have their cameras removed, he had taken eleven days to get a single shot the way he wanted it, he had changed a piece of wallpaper, invisibly in the background of one scene, for a different colour after the third take. This was the volatile perfectionist of old. And yet, unexpectedly, there had been no major battles, no interference from either MGM or Carlo Ponti, who had left him entirely to his own devices, and none of the problems with schedules and cash that seem to have haunted his career since he scraped together his first documentary in the late 1940s. He had simply, quietly, made himself a movie.

I found him wandering gloomily round Jenny Runacre, who was nervously tubular in blue. 'No,' he murmured sadly, 'it's not...' The wardrobe girl, fluttering hangers like steel butterflies, draped a sheaf of alternative garments across the furniture. A fawn trouser-suit materialised, Antonioni looked marginally happier, and everybody vanished into a cutting room which was conveniently doubling as the set of a television studio in which Nicholson's last filmed report is inspected for clues (another echo, perhaps, of *Blow Up*?). Forty Italian technicians caused the room to bulge somewhat. Was it like this working with Dwoskin, I asked Miss Runacre, and not surprisingly received a negative answer. Then she thought for a while and said that well, there *were* similarities; both men were geniuses, for example, and had an instinctive knowledge of what they wanted from their performers, they were very alike in what they expected. Summoned back into the scrum, she suddenly switched on an expression of vulnerable independence and for a flash, tawny hair curling around angular face, she looked exactly like Monica Vitti. I asked someone who had designed Miss Runacre's coiffure. Antonioni had, of course.

The Italians laughed with enormous energy, trod all over each other's feet, and released Ian Hendry from their midst. 'It's not a very big part, just an integral one,' he said, looking worried. He couldn't, it seemed, get the measure of Antonioni, who changed things all the time—words, timing, lights, speed, emphasis. 'He carries it all in his head, which makes it difficult to understand; it all happens in his own way, at his own pace. But he's brilliant, he can say in one word what others would take a sentence to tell you. I just hope I'm giving him what he wants, that's all.' Nobody else doubted, however, that Antonioni was getting exactly what he wanted.

Retiring to the back of an enormous car parked between vans and old buses beside the studio, Antonioni himself turned out to be only too ready to talk about his film—everything, that is, bar the story. 'I don't think that the details of the story should be told, because nobody would then be interested in the film. I never want to know the story of a film I am going to see, it would spoil it for me.' Had he, even so, consciously adapted the original script to fit his own ideas? He had indeed. 'I changed the ending of the film compared to the version Mark wrote, also the beginning and a lot of other things. I had to make the film closer to my own nature, of course. I have to tell you something: this is the most rationalised film I have ever made. I started working on the script in a completely detached way, because of the circumstances. But little by little I got more and more involved in it, and I began to rationalise everything, to try to understand *myself* in this story, to put myself into the story. And then at the end of it everything came instinctively. The idea of the film is a man who changes his identity, and I realised that I myself had this feeling many times, of changing my identity. Every moment, we keep changing according to our experiences, and we never know what experience we may have within a few minutes that will change our identity again.'

Had he adapted the film in any way to suit the personalities of his two leading players, both of them known for their highly individual styles? 'No, I think the film affected the way *they* worked. Nicholson was rather lost, I think, because he wasn't used to working my way. I use actors like elements of the image, which they are—sometimes the most important element, but not always. They are used to having long talks with the director about everything, but I think it's not worthwhile to do this, because you can use thousands of words but your face can express everything quite simply. And only the director can judge; the actor *can't* know, because he can only see the film through his own character. I don't know if I succeeded, but I tried to bring Nicholson as close as possible to *my* character in the film, something quite different from anything he has done before.

'But I have to say that without him I couldn't have done this film, because he is so strong, he has a marvellous face, his look is so cool, so intense. It wasn't easy for an actor like him, so professional, so conscious of the technique, the position of the camera. But he never makes a mistake, he makes any gesture seem natural. Maria Schneider, on the contrary, makes mistakes every moment, she doesn't know where the camera is; but that's marvellous too in a way, because she has the power to concentrate herself within a scene, to forget everything. And she is very photogenic, her face is so alive, she has weight on the screen and you look at her.'

I wondered if all his experiences in the States and more recently in China, two starkly opposite extremes, had fundamentally altered his outlook since the days of the trilogy, those Northern Italian meditations only lightly thawed by the Roman sunlight in *L'Eclisse*. 'I remember that when I got back from *Zabriskie Point* after almost two years of life abroad, having practically made a tour of the world, I felt rootless. I was another person really, and I don't know whether it was good or not, but I had lost something and I had gained something else. So I had to start from the beginning, in a sense, and find what interested me. When I went to China I wanted to put this experience to the extreme, because China is really another dimension of life, it's another philosophy, completely a new world. So I wanted to have this experience; and looking back at *Zabriskie Point* and at *China*, I now see my role as having been an observer, a reporter, and this feeling is certainly carried forward into *Profession: Reporter*, which is a realistic film as far as the image is concerned, because the camera is always objective. Just as the central character is a witness, so I wanted my camera to stand by, to be a witness in its own turn.'

Might there be some political bias as a result? A reporter can seldom be wholly objective today? 'In this new film there is a political side, it's quite strong, because this man is very frustrated for many reasons. First, his marriage has not been good, then he adopted a child but the relationship didn't work, then he wasn't happy about his own job, he wanted to be more committed but he didn't know how. So he goes to make a documentary film about Africa, and in this position, confronted with

the problem of the Third World, I would say that quite a strong political view of him emerges. So if one wants to find a political bias in my previous films, it's not direct—but it's coming to the surface in this one.'

Recalling the Mirella Ricciardi photographs of Kenya in *L'Eclisse* and the reports of Antonioni's Amazon explorations for *Technically Sweet*, I asked if the jungle had a special attraction for him. He agreed, with enthusiasm, that he loved Africa. He had been sent there as a journalist when he first reached Rome in 1940, and he had travelled across the continent and never forgotten it. One day, he might make his perfect film there, but he wanted to experiment first with some new cameras he had discovered in Britain, which could help him realise another project that always seems to have been on his mind—the idea of 'painting' a film.

'These marvellous telecameras have control trailers where you can "direct" colours. For instance, I had one camera look at the sky, another at a castle, and I got one picture with the sky looking orange and the castle green—amazing contrasts. You can get any colour you want, while you're shooting, you just turn a knob. So I have in mind a film made up of real scenes, remembered scenes, and imagined scenes. The camera records everything you set in front of it, but the human memory doesn't work like that—we remember only atmosphere, colours, fragments, tiny portions of an event. I want the film to explore these ideas, but it can only be done with this equipment. For *Red Desert*, I painted a wood white to show that it was dead (it was poisoned by the factory nearby; when I went back later I found that my prediction was correct), but when we tried to film it the light was wrong and it looked black. Then the paint started to come off. We couldn't get it right. But with this new technique I wouldn't have the problem. I would do it electronically.'

One of the gadgets that had appealed to him while filming *Profession: Reporter* had been the new Westcam, a camera mounted on a gyroscope that will go practically anywhere. The final scene of the film, he said, had been constructed around this remarkably mobile piece of equipment, floating it in and out of windows and over a roof—they'd had a lot of fun with it. Antonioni seemed, in fact, to have enjoyed a great deal of the past eighteen weeks. 'When I come on to the set in the morning, I don't know what I will shoot, I don't *want* to know. When I started this film, I knew the day before what I would be shooting the next day, it was almost boring; but little by little I got more involved in the story and everything came out and the script was so clear to me suddenly. At the beginning it was like a mosaic, part in Munich, part in Africa, in Spain, London, Spain again—it was a muddle. But after a while I noticed, I really noticed one day that everything was clear in my mind, every part of the script, every piece of the mosaic, and from that moment on I didn't think of it any more. When I was shooting my previous films—it's not a good word, but I *suffered* a lot, I was always suffering. But not with this one, and I don't know why not, I really don't know. It was like going to see a movie...'

WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG

Ivor Montagu

'Blest was it in that dawn to be alive!' These words of Ulrich von Hutten, somewhere between the Renaissance and the Reformation, have since been used by many and varied persons to describe their emotional reactions. Rather oddly, Hitler declared that he felt that way (and went down on his knees in the street in thanksgiving) when he heard of the ultimatum that heralded the Great War of 1914, that holocaust which ended the aspirations of so many of his fellow youngsters and rewarded his own, after four and a half years effort, with promotion to corporal.

Yet, looking back upon it, and certainly in terms of cinema, it can never have been more applicable than to the period fifty years ago, of the young Soviet cinema in the early days of the 1920s. The Revolution had barely happened, the Civil War still flamed sporadically, corpses lay in the streets of Kiev, ruin and privation stalked the land. But for the youth that studied and argued and acted and dressed up and walked the tightrope (literally), and who now look back upon these excitements as grave and reverend signiors, there was not, and could never have been, just such a dawn as this. And the matter is much deeper than a golden, subjective glow. The cold historian must share this verdict too.

'Astonishing and wonderful days,' Yutkevich calls them in his reminiscence, the opening essay of *Cinema in Revolution**; but our own staid David Robinson, almost on the way to becoming an institution himself, heartily agrees, noting that while the essays in this book do not add up to an exact total history of the unique epoch, they do revive for us, half a century afterwards, a picture of its atmosphere, its feeling, its 'exultation'.

Robinson, in his admirable and perceptive introduction, calls the generation 'enchanted' and explains: 'The boys who yelled Mayakovski songs about the streets

of Kiev and Moscow and Petrograd, and painted buildings and banners and improvised plays and puppet shows and argued and called meetings and argued some more, proved to be a generation as creatively gifted as any nation had known at any time; and their contribution to the arts of the twentieth century deeply affects us today.' (Robinson's summing up, and indeed the whole joyous spirit of these recollections, do not very much chime with the somewhat gloomy picture of *this identical* epoch, the freest perhaps in artistic experiment in any society at any time, conveyed to present-day readers by Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*; a wise reminder to take that work, whatever its other merits, not as veridical history but as fiction.) This last quotation from Robinson raises a fresh point. These were certainly exceptional times. Was this also an exceptional generation? To look at the list of personages whose writings and memories have been drawn on for this book it would certainly appear so, but I am not sure that there is not a better explanation.

In those days the cast was young, the art was young, and the world itself was young too. As so rarely in the experience either of nations or individuals, the time, the place and the loved one all came together.

Young? The cast could hardly have been younger. Robinson picks out from Kozintsev's narrative the adventures of FEKS (the 'Theatre of the Eccentric Actor')—'how three or four teenagers with enthusiasm as their only credential could be given a real theatre of their own to play with'; and Gerasimov's account of how, when he himself joined FEKS only two or three years later, he found Kozintsev and his associates being attacked in their turn by a handful of 16-year-olds for alleged conservatism and academicism.

The statistics on this point are even more eloquent. If you take 1920 as the immediate post-revolution departure point, when most of these founding fathers began, despite the privations and the chaos, to think and do about art, you find that a *full half* of those contributing here were then still teenagers. Eisenstein in those days earned the nickname of 'Old Man'—that stuck to him ever after—because his ripe age then was all of 22. Indeed, only three (incidentally by no means the least experimentalising) could be counted as coming in already as 'veterans' (i.e., after war service or the like): Dovzhenko, Dziga Vertov and Pudovkin. And not one of these at that time was as yet anywhere near thirty.

The art itself was young. As art, indeed, it was as yet unborn, unrecognised. This is difficult sometimes for our contemporaries to appreciate, so coddled are they by film quarterlies, film institutes, film federations and film appreciation. 'Film' as such was anti-art throughout the social establishment, if not actually a dirty word at least a vulgar habit.

I have already written somewhere of meeting a Japanese actor at a London party about this time and asking him if he had ever appeared in films himself. He looked down his nose and answered with what sounded like an explosive, if somewhat prolonged monosyllable, which his interpreter translated as follows: 'Mr. X says

that in Japan only those appear in films who cannot sing, dance or act.' Romm in this book tells an equally illuminating story. For a time in the 1920s he enrolled in the 'Institute of Methods of Extra-Mural Work' (*sic*) and studied the impact of film on 7 to 9-year-old children. Then at last he had a chance himself to become a scenarist.

'The great day arrived. I was going to say farewell to the Institute of Methods of Extra-Mural Work. My boss was a very charming little old lady. Our relations were pastoral, delightful. After listening to me, she remained silent a moment; then she asked me to leave her office and to come back half an hour later for her reply. When I came back, she greeted me standing, her eyes full of tears, and addressed me exactly as one speaks over the coffin of someone deceased: "Alas, dear Mikhail Ilyich! You were a young man of purity and full of talent. You have a good heart and I love you like a son. Now you are going to enter into cinematographic production. A year from now you are going to become a businessman and a shark... Don't argue—I know what cinema is! You are going to become a very bad man. But I want to keep an unclouded memory of you. So from now on, I do not know you and I do not wish to know you. Go, and may you be happy! I am sure you will be successful." I left troubled, moved—and light-hearted.'

You don't believe it? I do. Even the great who meant well could be very wounding. In 1928, the self-same year that Romm is writing about, Eisenstein and I dined at High Table in Trinity as the guests of Peter Kapitza, then a Fellow. When the port was circulating after dinner, the Master, Sir J. J. Thomson, one of the most distinguished of living physicists, desiring to put the visitors at ease, leant over towards us and said: 'I understand, Mr. Eisenstein, you are connected with the kye-nee-ma. I witnessed a kye-nematograph performance once.'

Our youngsters in this adventure gathered from all parts of the vast territory—Kiev, Riga, Leningrad, Penza—to heady Moscow, from all strata—students, peasant lads, an incipient diplomat, an ex-boxer—and they plunged into all manner of edges of art, as painters, sculptors, stage managers, writers, scene-shifters, actors, acrobats. One great influence was the circus. It saved them from being both too solemn and too highbrow. One writer here usefully points out that Eisenstein's famous 'montage of attractions'—a phrase which his epigones have explained (and which indeed in later life he certainly so used) in a general sense to signify the editing composition of all included affective elements—was originally no more in meaning, and no less, than the impresario's showmanship in arranging the sequence of variety turns available on the bill. Another influence—and David Robinson has been most acute and helpful in disentangling this—was the enormously fertile and hitherto insufficiently recognised precept and example of Meyerhold, who himself scarcely made a film, certainly none that has survived. These young people gravitated to cinema. Why? Because it was a *tabula rasa*. Nature abhors a vacuum.

I do not mean that the cinema had no achievements in those days. Of course not. Griffith had worked. Chaplin had worked.

*CINEMA IN REVOLUTION (*Le Cinéma Soviétique par ceux qui l'ont fait*), edited by Luda and Jean Schnitzer and Marcel Martin, translated and with additional material by David Robinson (Secker and Warburg, £3.00).

The works of these great forerunners (especially the former) were enormously appreciated and studied by the young virtuosi of the Soviet cinema, and they learned immensely from them. The masters of U.S.A., France, Italy, Britain worked from gut-sense and unformulated experience. Their masterpieces just *happened*. They were themselves too busy to be conscious how. Neither they nor their apprentices had time to study. The treadmill of livelihood involved continuous production. 'Art' was a term of fear, unpleasing to a magnate's ear.

In the young U.S.S.R., on the contrary, it was a magnate himself who was unpleasing, and 'art' a sacred cow, a 'good' that for the first time had to be made available, for a share both in consumption and production, to the whole of the people. The 'new' was in credit, the whole temper of the day discredited denigration of experiment, nor had anyone a right to damn experiment. The would-be cineastes themselves were in luck, they found themselves largely without cameras or celluloid! They found themselves with opportunity—most of the prior film world had run away—but it was an opportunity to study. They could argue and work out and act and reargue—and chew over and analyse and reconstruct the Western imports that their own directors in the West had seldom time even to look at—before ever they had occasion to shout 'Shoot!' or 'Cut!' in real earnest.

The consequence was the school; not doctrine from teachers so much as discovery, joint exploration of teachers and pupils, the two not always clearly distinguishable, but foremost among the former: Kuleshov (the only one in the whole story with any experience in cinema before the revolution and himself at this time only 21—we in the West know his teachings through the intermediary of the writings of his pupil Pudovkin) and Eisenstein. They invented not 'film art' itself, of course, but film aesthetics, conscious rules and principles guiding the understanding of cause and effect in the given art. And this made the historic step forward. Every work of art requires an artist as creator, but all but the naïve artist is none the worse for a bit of science.

It is because it was thus the first 'word' (not of course the last) on which our subsequent edifice is erected that, as Robinson says, 'it deeply affects us today.' But I think the most important lesson to take from it is not to see here a unique, or even especially gifted, set of individuals, so much as a rarely occurring set of favourable circumstances—a sense of the infinite potentiality of human resources to be tapped by every new propitious concatenation, the ever available mute inglorious Miltons who this time gained the chance to raise their voice.

I do not acknowledge that the usually lesser shining of today, when youth here, striving to rebel, often loses itself in a blind alley, invalidates this optimism. In the Moscow of 1920 the enviroing ambience had an essential third ingredient to let genius flower, a pervasive climate of the sense that service to the community was needed and noble; this effectively channelled the lust for adventurous self-expression



Kozintsev and Trauberg's 'S.V.D.' (1927)



Pudovkin's 'Chess Fever' (1925)



Kuleshov's 'The Death Ray' (1925)



Stage design by Yutkevich for 'The Traitor' (1926)

away from barren solipsism, or mere inquisitiveness about method, into the scientific search for the most effective means of rendering a particular content, and so serving an aim. I do not question the (evident) capacity for idealism in the youth of today; but alas, in one form of society the Establishment mistrusts the aims and ambience which idealism in youth creates, and so directs what opportunities it grants towards the willingly subordinate and the contentedly irrelevant. The other Establishment, rightly (in my view) valuing the achievement of which it has become the guardian, inclines to over-caution in its encounters with experiment. Nevertheless, I admit no pessimism. Doubtless many fresh conjunctions and more glorious dawns are yet to come.

If meanwhile you want to freshen up about this one, you could find no better guide to its film impact than the book David Robinson has edited and supplemented so well. Separately the dozen contributions vary in quality; together they make up a good team. All the contributors have been or are directors; one is principally a cameraman, another a scenarist. Yutkevich, Kuleshov, Kozintsev, Gerasimov, Golovnya, Gabrilovich and Romm are exceedingly informative; all (except one) are lively and graphic in the highest degree. That one is Golovnya, who has grown up a bit of an old stick—what I have heard another of the breed label himself as, a 'Soviet conservative'. But this does not matter; he provides an excellent counterweight. Grisha Alexandrov's contribution, interesting in matter, does not in detail always chime with my recollection. The extracts from Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko are extremely sketchy, but this is a minor blemish; very much has already been published by all these authors, and in any case the trifles here are extremely characteristic and serve to highlight much that is said about them by others in other parts of the book. The illustrations are fascinating and many of them are new even to old foyes like the present reviewer, who knew personally so many of those portrayed.

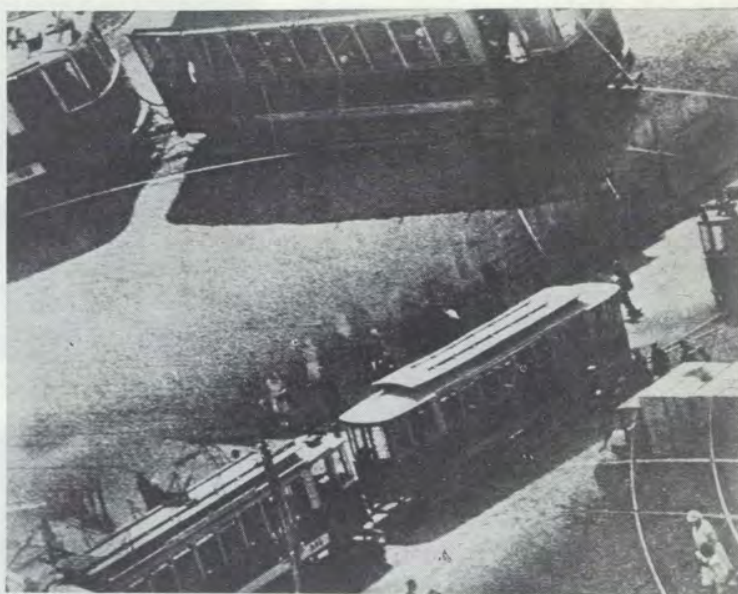
Not only is the translation clear, but David Robinson, besides putting us in debt with his introduction, has enormously enhanced the clarity and value of the book to an English reader of these days by his supplemental critique plus potted biography and iconography of every contributor preceding each essay, and by a glossary of all the mentioned surnames added at the end.

With so much to commend, it inevitably seems niggling to find fault. However, I think three points of criticism are fair: the transliteration of Russian names is not always consistent and has sometimes been influenced by its transit via French; it is a pity that, evidently to avoid duplication, the glossary excludes entries respecting the twelve contributors themselves. Lastly, better source particulars for the contributions should have been provided. We gather that four of them wholly, and a fifth in part, derive from interviews specially taped either in Moscow or in Paris between 1964 and 1966. But the rest lack indication of either source or (if any) place of prior publication, and all but one of these are without date. A pity.



Seth
Feldman

Dziga
Vertov
and the
Leninist
proportion



CINEMA WEEKLY and CINEMA TRUTH

It has become increasingly apparent to those concerned with Soviet cinema that previously accepted explanations of the birth of the 'golden age' of the 1920s are no longer adequate. It is simply foolish, for instance, to explain Russian montage as the result either of a shortage of raw stock or of Kuleshov's study of Griffith. A third theory, linking the films of the 1920s with activities in other Soviet arts, fails to take into account the special status given to film by the newly victorious Bolshevik government. Of all the arts practised in Russia, film was chosen by Lenin to play the greatest role in consolidating the power of the new regime. It was not, however, the conventional film of 1917 that Lenin had in mind. In a memo dictated some time after his original pronouncement on cinema, Lenin added the proviso that the Soviet film industry ought to devote 75 per cent of its resources to the factual film—a genre which, by the time of the Revolution, had fallen into worldwide neglect.

The Soviet cineaste who most staunchly advocated adherence to the 'Leninist proportion' was Dziga Vertov. That Dziga Vertov discovered the basics of Soviet montage simultaneously with Kuleshov, and that he developed the technique with an intensity far surpassing that of his contemporaries, would in itself justify the attention he is now receiving from historians and film-makers. What makes Vertov's work even more interesting is that he accomplished his ends not by virtue of an abstract aesthetic, but rather by attempting to meet the needs of post-Revolutionary Russia with uniquely ingenious applications of the potentials of film.

Vertov's earliest works show this awareness of how to create films in response to social realities. The *Kinonedelia* ('Cinema Weekly') and *Kinopravda* ('Cinema Truth') newsreel series were, respectively, his first work in film and his first attempt to go beyond the limitations of a time when, as Vertov remembered it, 'filming was being conducted under battle conditions on all fronts.'* *Kinonedelia* demonstrated how effective a newsreel could be as a tool for social change. *Kinopravda* expanded the

scope of the newsreel to include analytic interpretations of non-immediate subject matter. In all, *Kinonedelia* consisted of 43 issues released in 1918 and 1919. Twenty-three issues of *Kinopravda* were produced between 1922 and 1925.

Vertov's introduction to cinema, according to Alexandre Lemberg's account of it†, was typical of his generation's accidental discoveries. Some time during the Kerensky period, Lemberg, a newsreel cameraman just back from the front, met Vertov, a would-be Futurist poet, at what Lemberg refers to only as a 'poets' café'. Like a Russian Jules and Jim, the two men struck up an immediate friendship. Vertov frequented Lemberg's home and experimented with the equipment owned by Lemberg and his cameraman father. By the time the October Revolution came to Moscow, he was convinced he had found his calling.

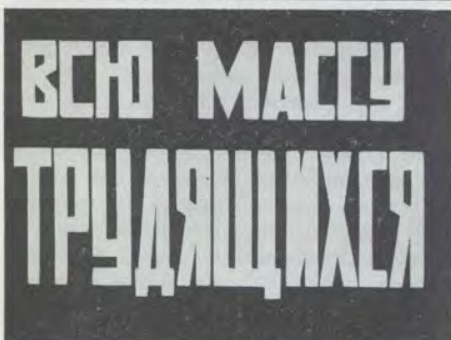
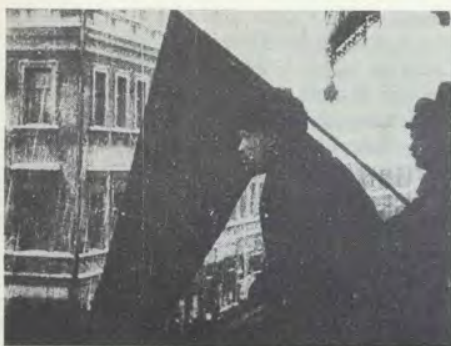
*'The Writings of Dziga Vertov', translated by Val Thalberg. *Film Culture*, No. 25 (Spring, 1962).

†Alexandre Lemberg, 'Dziga Vertov Prikhodit v Kino', *Iz Istarii Kino* (1968).

The immediate results of the Revolution were not encouraging to any would-be film-maker. As neither film stock nor film equipment had ever been produced in Russia, the Bolsheviks, in the face of a trade embargo, could make no promises of supplies. What little stock and equipment remained in the country was largely in the hands of those hostile to the new regime. But on March 4, 1918, some five months after the Revolution, the first step was taken to provide the Government with an agency for cinema production. On that date, the Praesidium of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies of the City of Moscow decreed that an inventory be made of all cinema equipment in the city and forbade further hoarding of equipment and stock. Two weeks later NARKOMPROS, the People's Commissariat of Education, took control of the resources of the Skobelev Committee, the state film production unit under Kerensky. But it would not be for another two months that the equipment so taken would be allocated to the only group within NARKOMPROS with any idea for its use, the self-proclaimed Moscow Kino Committee.

Handed their equipment on May 26, the Committee, under the direction of Mikhail Koltsov, was able to release *Kinonedelia No. 1* one week later. Whatever part Vertov, as the Committee's secretary, played in this first production was probably eclipsed by the skills of the cameramen Lemberg, A. A. Levitskii, P. K. Novitskii, G. B. Giber, Eduard Tisse, P. V. Ermlov and others. While these men went out in search of news, Vertov watched how the fragments of what they shot were pieced together by his future wife and editing assistant, Elizabeta Svilova.

Above: 'Kino-Eye' poster by Rodchenko (1924); right, 'Man with the Movie Camera'



'Kinopravda No. 21': Lenin in 1919; 'death to the bourgeoisie'; title: 'and the masses of labour'; 'children of all peoples are part of one family'

By the time Koltsov was called to the front in the summer of 1918, Vertov had gained the acumen to take over the entire operation.

The primary task he inherited from Koltsov was to emphasise the establishment of Bolshevik authority throughout the expanses of what was to become the USSR. Amid interventionist invasions and the emerging forces of the Civil War, the most important message *Kinonedelia* had to deliver was that the new government was continuing to function and was establishing roots deeper than those of the ephemeral regime that had so recently fallen. To achieve this end, *Kinonedelia* relied on conventional newsreel images whose power can only be appreciated if they are seen in the context of their times. Item one in *Kinonedelia No. 1* consists of nothing more than the dedication of a monument to Marx in Moscow. We see

speakers standing at the base of a large bust of Marx, and later a parade. But what we are also seeing is the opening of a new set of eyes, the first images that Soviet film was able to produce of the achievement of Communism in Russia. The simple item is a dedication to the future of *Kinonedelia*, its purpose and its audience. It is also a self-congratulatory proclamation by those who, only fifteen months before, had been ruled by a medieval monarchy.

Approximately one-third of the items in *Kinonedelia* deal with this theme of the establishment of the Soviet State. They range from shots of children on a peasant commune to the meeting of the VI Extraordinary All-Russian Congress of Soviets. In some cases, it can be assumed, the presentation of these items was primarily informative, telling people about new and unfamiliar institutions. In other cases, depending on how well informed a particular audience was, such items could have the equally useful function of reinforcing previously publicised information by the addition of photographic 'proof'.

Complementing the items on new institutions are film portraits which served to introduce the new leaders of the Soviet Government and armed forces, lending an air of reality to figures who had been publicised by other media. In two instances, however, the images of leaders take on a more important function. In *Kinonedelia No. 22*, shots of Lenin recovering from wounds are inserted as a reassurance to those concerned about him after Dora Kaplan's assassination attempt. A similar item, contradicting rumours of the death of E. K. Breshko-Breshovskaya, also recognises and reacts to a specific question in the mind of a potential audience.

Soviet leaders were not the only political figures presented to the public by *Kinonedelia*. Film portraits of enemies appeared with some frequency; and the device of portraying the enemy among items concerning the new regime was consistent with the theme of conflict that runs through the newsreel series. As the Civil War intensified, the juxtaposition of images of pro- and anti-Soviet leaders was complemented by a growing number of items concerning battles and trials of anti-government figures.

As the number of items concerning conflict increased, so did the sophistication and intensity of montage with which these conflicts were presented. Early news stories about the Civil War are placed almost haphazardly. An item entitled 'Workers Appeal for the Defence of the Socialist Nation' (in *No. 4*) can almost be mistaken for another 'human interest' story, sandwiched as it is between an item on the Kazan Station in Moscow and a part of the regular 'Petrograd in These Days' series. But a vastly improved presentation of war news can be seen in *Kinonedelia No. 19*. In item four, we are shown a sequence which begins with shots of a dead sailor, continues with shots of the interventionist arms used to kill him and ends with a pan around newly captured territory. The sailor, the mute evidence of the invaders and the long shot of the captured land together achieve a montage effect, creating a motif present in no single image. It is only because the three images are put together the way they are that we know a battle has taken place.

The montage structure of *Kinonedelia No. 19* does not end with item four. Item five is a series of shots of the Ukrainian Nationalist leader Skoropadskii leading public prayers against the Soviets. Item six, announcing the execution of an enemy, follows as if to predict the fate of anti-Soviet figures such as Skoropadskii. Item seven is then presented with a dual effect. While it too announces the death of an enemy leader (Bochkareva, the commander of the reactionary Women's Fighting Battalion), it leaves as the final image of the entire newsreel shots of Bochkareva at a moment of power. By using these old shots of Bochkareva, Vertov achieves a montage collision between images of the counter-revolutionary in action and the news transmitted by the title. The net effect is to reiterate the overriding theme of these last four items: the Revolution's inevitable triumph over its enemies.

A third kind of montage that Vertov began to develop in *Kinonedelia* was the more formal cutting between images which was later to become his trademark. In *Kinonedelia No. 30*, one can all but feel Vertov's exhilaration when, for the first time, he cuts purely on motion. The shots are taken from the front of a train as it goes round bends in a snow-covered, mountainous area. As the cars begin to swing to screen right, there is a sudden cut and they are seen going off to screen left. The sequence is continued in this manner for a total of five edits in the space of a little less than a minute of screen time. The pace, of course, is ridiculously slow. Nevertheless, it creates within the viewer the sense of cinematically augmented motion, the production of movement that could not exist without cinema. In later manifestoes, Vertov was to refer to this aspect of his work as the Cinema Eye: 'I am eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, am showing you a world the likes of which only I can see.'

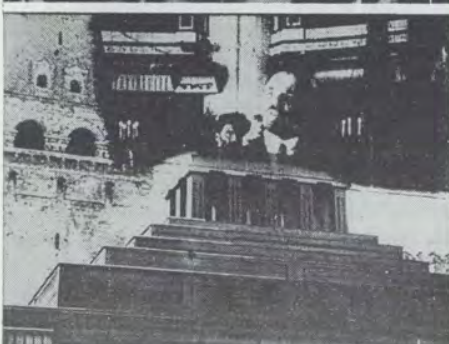
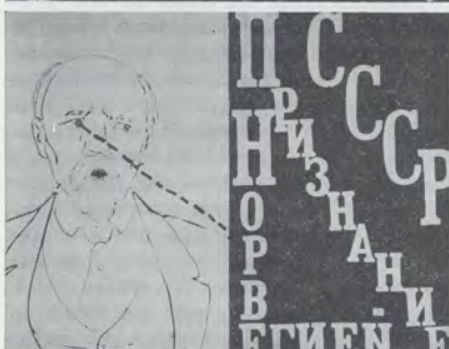
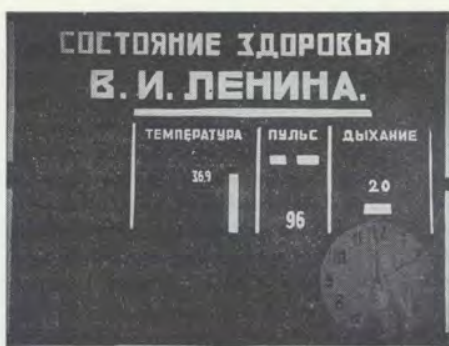
While what was to become the Cinema Eye is just barely apparent in *Kinonedelia*, the second of Vertov's major principles, Life Caught Unawares, played a prominent part in the newsreels. As it came to be defined in later writings and films, Life Caught Unawares meant the creation of a sense in the viewer that the activities of the subject on the screen had not been affected by the presence of the camera. The hidden camera, a favourite device of Vertov's cameraman brother Mikhail Kaufman (who did not join Vertov until 1922), played a small role in creating these images. More often, and more significantly, Vertov would depend on his subject being too busy to call attention to the camera's presence. In later films, particularly *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), this technique was developed into a kind of barometer of social involvement. In *Man with the Movie Camera*, only the social outcast and the NEP-man call attention to the camera, true participants in Socialist activities having no time to 'mug'.

In *Kinonedelia*, Life Caught Unawares is used as both an organisation and an ideological tool. What now look like rather anodyne shots of people strolling through parks, listening to concerts and standing in queues in front of city shops, in 1918 and 1919 took on altogether different meanings.

The shots of queues, for instance, worked to counteract a traditional town/country animosity that had intensified in Russia during the period of War Communism. They were evidence to country people that those in the cities were suffering privations similar to their own. Conversely, simple shots of farm activities were aimed at city people alarmed by rumours of rural food hoarding. Taken together, items of this sort were meant to produce the impression of a growing bond between rural and urban areas engaged in a shared struggle against equal hardships. The official admission that these hardships existed undoubtedly helped the credibility of *Kinonedelia* (and of the government that sponsored it). Furthermore, the images of citizens from all over Russia working to achieve Communism created, over the weeks, a continuing travelogue of social progress, a theme more explicitly developed in later Vertov films like *Sixth Part of the Earth* (1926).

Ideologically, this emphasis on the common man as news had ramifications for both Socialist art and cinema history. While cinema itself was nothing new to the Russian people, the idea of a cinema which placed them on a screen so recently reserved for actors and dignitaries was not only a novelty (boosting distribution) but a celebration of their victory in the class struggle. And, just as it was appropriate for the first Socialist cameras to be turned upon the common man, it was equally fitting that Vertov, a neophyte film-maker, should all but quote the earliest works of his medium, the studies of home life and street scenes with which Lumière began world cinema. The images produced by *Life Caught Unawares* represented the first cinema products since Lumière in which the camera had not been a self-conscious factor in the arrangement of the images it produced. To Vertov, this meant that the film-maker could be accepted into the new society as a fellow-worker rather than as a boss (as he was in fiction film) or a dispassionate observer (as he was supposed to be in contemporary newsreels).

This conception of the film-maker as a fellow-worker may be traced back to the attitude expressed by the Moscow Kino Committee towards their predecessors in *Kinonedelia* No. 1. In the last item of that issue, a shot of the moribund Skobelev Committee was placed after the title: 'The Skobelev Committee at the End of the Holiday'. Nor did this proclamation of new vigour prove to be an idle boast. By the time the Soviet Government had nationalised cinema production in August 1919, Vertov had not only produced all of *Kinonedelia** but had also edited three short compilation films: *Battle at Tsaritsyn*, *The Trial of Miranov* and *The Unearthing of the Remains of Sergei Radonezhskogo* (all 1919). At the time of nationalisation, he was working on *Anniversary of the Revolution* (1919), a twelve-reel compilation film chosen by Lenin as one of the first Soviet works of art to be sent abroad. By the time he began work on *Kinopravda* in June 1922, Vertov had, besides supervising film work at the



'Kinopravda No. 21': 'the iron leader is sick': animated hospital bulletin; May Day 1920; cerebral strain; Lenin lying in state; a superimposition, Lenin and mausoleum

front, edited the thirteen-reel compilation film *History of the Civil War* (1922) as well as the shorter films *All-Russian Elder Kalinin* and *The Agit Train of the Central Party* (both 1921).

These last two films are indicative of Vertov's interest in new methods of dis-

tribution. Both grew out of his travels with Soviet President Kalinin on the agit-train *Lenin* in 1920. Using a specially designed film car aboard the agit-train (in much the same manner as Medvedkin some dozen years later), Vertov composed a continually changing travelogue, showing audiences newly edited films while shooting their reactions and their surroundings for insertion into the films they were watching. Vertov repeated this technique during his travel on the agit-steamer *Red Star*, the result being the film *Instructional Steamer 'Red Star'* (1924). The technique of including audience response as part of a film's content would be repeated in *Sixth Part of the Earth* and would be a central motif in *Man with the Movie Camera*.

When Vertov returned to Moscow to make *Kinopravda*, he brought with him the ability to liberate film from the conventions of the film theatre and make it part of the architecture of the Soviet City. The Kinoks (practitioners of the Cinema Eye), as Vertov's production group began to call themselves, were as serious about distributing films as they were about making them. *Kinopravda* No. 9 shows the Kinoks setting up a mobile projector and having an image on a portable screen in what they claim to be 90 seconds from their time of arrival at any location. Vertov also hoped that accessibility to cinema would not be limited to a passive audience. In 1923, an effort was undertaken to organise clubs of cinema correspondents along the lines followed by the American *Newsreel* organisation of the 1960s. Unfortunately, the scarcity of materials in the USSR limited this proposed cinema network to films such as *Kinopravda* No. 19, made during the travels of the Moscow-based film-workers.

Exercising his role as a fellow-worker, Vertov's main concern in the first *Kinopravdas* was to help organise public assistance for victims of the 1922 famine. In items concerning the famine, he tempers the shock of images taken in the devastated areas with other images of a Soviet government taking steps to alleviate the situation. As in the *Kinonedelia* item concerning Bochkareva, he experiments with collisions between the message on the title card and the shots that follow. In one instance, we are told that sightseeing flights over Moscow have been organised as a fund-raising device to help the famine areas. But what we actually see on the screen are images of a modern airplane and a vast Soviet city. The sense of urgency produced by the title card collides with the sense of reassurance provided by the images, to leave the viewer with the net impression that the problem will eventually be solved.

The techniques of formal montage which first appeared in *Kinonedelia* were developed to the utmost during the *Kinopravda* period. One typical example of the close cutting was the opening sequence of *Kinoglaz*, a feature made by the Kinoks in 1924. Within the first forty metres of the film, Vertov creates an explosion of no less than 57 shots of dancing, drinking figures. A similar effect is created in the last sequence of *Kinopravda* No. 18. Here, a burst of some 60 eight to four frame shots of faces and mouths and machinery is used to convey a crescendo of enthusiasm.

*Georges Sadoul questions Vertov's editorship of *Kinonedelias* Nos. 38, 39, 41, 42. See Sadoul's 'Bio-Filmographie de Dziga Vertov'. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV, 146 (August, 1963).

This particular item illustrates a difference in emphasis between *Kinonedelia* and *Kinopravda*. Within the item, we are shown workers shutting down their machines to attend a ceremony honouring a newly born 'October baby'. The baby is passed among a small group of Party members, Komsomols and Pioneers, gifts are presented to the parents, and the singing of the Internationale begins. It is at this point that the machinery seems to set itself in motion and join in the singing, for the montage finale described above.

From the stiff, nervous performances of the participants in the ceremony, it is apparent that Vertov in this sequence has little use for Life Caught Unawares. Nor is this the only *Kinopravda* item which looks posed. In a sequence in No. 8, showing eager citizens snapping up news of the trial of the Social Revolutionaries, we see Vertov and his brother in the back seat of a speeding car taking a newspaper from a boy running alongside. Other shots within *Kinopravda* are as, if not more, evidently contrived.

But if Vertov seems in *Kinopravda* at times to abandon Life Caught Unawares, he does so in the fervour of creative freedom which characterises this new stage of his work. The success of *Kinonedelia* and of the compilation films guaranteed him government support (one instance in which the availability rather than the scarcity of stock and equipment encouraged montage experimentation). During the production of *Kinopravda*, Vertov had a large stock of archive material on which to draw. He had a large and competent staff. Producing another newsreel series (*Goskinokalendar*) concurrently with *Kinopravda* gave him a second large stock of facilities, as well as an overview of Soviet current events. At the same time, *Goskinokalendar*, a more conventional newsreel, relieved him of the necessity of presenting 'straight' news in *Kinopravda*.

Consequently, *Kinopravda* existed as a purely experimental venture in the cinematic interpretation of current events. The Cinema Eye was given a free hand in constructing and reconstructing those images which the news produced. Cameras were cranked at a multitude of speeds and mounted on every conceivable vehicle. Animation became a regular feature. Vertov remembered having invented entire new genres: 'Review films, sketch films, verse films, film poems and preview films made their appearance... Considerable work was done in the utilisation of new methods for subtitling, transforming titles into pictorial units equal to the images.'

Trying to do everything cinema could do, Vertov inevitably transgressed the boundaries of Life Caught Unawares. He found that one of the most useful capabilities of cinema was that of reproducing a posed or acted event. In *Kinopravda* No. 18, the nature of the story to be covered dictated the filming of people who were all too obviously altering their actions to suit the requirements of the camera.

However much the coverage of ceremonies may have presented a problem in this early work, the idea of the ceremony served in Vertov's later films as an effective compromise between the demands of Life Caught Unawares and the need to present images that furthered the theme of a given

film. While, strictly speaking, the orchestra conductor in *Enthusiasm* (1930) is not changing his actions for the benefit of the camera, he is still providing Vertov with the performance called for at that point in the film. This is not to say that the staged scene did not remain a part of Vertov's repertoire of cinematic devices for the rest of his career. It is merely to point out that the staged event, taken in conjunction with the demands of Life Caught Unawares, produced, as a hybrid, an interest in ceremony that provided one of Vertov's most frequently recurring themes.

Another motif running through all Vertov's films is his fascination with machinery, as demonstrated by the use of the machines in *Kinopravda* No. 18. Machines are employed metaphorically in sequences like that in *Kinopravda* No. 8, in which army tanks are almost literally converted into ploughshares as they are used to pull earth moving devices levelling the Moscow airport. Machines may also be used for humour, as in a sequence in *Shagi, Soviet* (1926) in which buses and trucks decide to hold a political rally without their drivers. But as Vertov himself stressed in the manifesto *WE*, machines are used most significantly when they are being integrated (via the Cinema Eye) into the life of man:

WE discover the soul of the machine, we are in love with the worker at his bench, we are in love with the farmer on his tractor, the engineer on his locomotive.

WE bring creative joy into every mechanical activity.

WE make peace between man and machine.

WE educate the new man.*

Man and his machinery are thus montage elements in the creation of a cinematic integration which, the Kinoks hoped, would reflect a similarly successful integration in the society of 'the new man'. In much the same way as man and his machines, man and his history are integrated in what is the longest and perhaps the most powerful of the *Kinopravda* issues. *Kinopravda* No. 21 is a 795 metre essay on the effect of Lenin's life and death upon the Russian people. Using the interpretative option of the series, Vertov chose not to treat Lenin's death as a news story but rather to collect all possible relevant images, produce his own animations, and carefully compose a montage around a set of subtitles which read like lines from a Mayakovskian poem.

The size and complexity of *Kinopravda* No. 21 indicate Vertov's impatience with the scale and the time limitations of the newsreel genre. Having released his first feature-length non-compilation film a year previously, he felt the time was right to make a full transition to feature productions. By 1925 Soviet feature films were commonplace throughout the USSR; and Vertov, as a pioneer of the Soviet industry and one of its most successful artists to date, might well have felt slighted had he been limited to the production of shorts.

Vertov's later troubles with the Soviet film industry were not to do with the length of his films, but rather were to come about because of contradictory conceptions concerning the importance of non-fiction

film. Much to Vertov's chagrin, the Soviet fiction film had emerged in the 1920s as the nation's most highly regarded art form. Against Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Dovzhenko in their prime, Vertov's insistence on the Leninist Proportion fell predictably flat. The vigour of his increasingly noisy protests earned him nothing but the continuing enmity of his contemporaries. After 1926, Vertov found himself in virtual exile in the Ukrainian film studios; an exile which was to last until the coming of the Second World War.

While Vertov's own career ended in frustration, the careers of those with whom he worked were in many ways advanced by their contact with him. It was Vertov who made the first demands on the cameramen who were later to make the great Soviet films. Eduard Tisse, Ilya Kopaline and Boris Frantsisson are examples of cinema workers whose early feedback came from seeing the use that Vertov made of their footage. Similarly, Mikhail Kaufman, an innovator in documentary in his own right, began his film career as a Kinok.

More important than any influence Vertov may have had on those who worked with him, was the impression that his newsreels and early features made on the minds of the Soviet film-makers who later directed works about the Revolutionary and Civil War periods. Few of these men were active film-makers during the period of these events; their impressions both at the time and in later years, when they followed the Soviet tradition of carefully researching historical footage, must have been to some extent shaped by Vertov's selection of images and montage arrangements. One may safely guess that many a re-created demonstration or Party Congress, as well as the costuming and direction of an infinite number of extras, grew out of Vertov's coverage of the original event. In *Kinonedelia* No. 10 and again in *Kinonedelia* No. 14, Vertov had preserved, for anyone interested in capturing the spirit of October, the revolutionary activity of pulling down a czarist statue. Other examples are less obvious. ■

Man with a movie camera: a 'Kinopravda' cameraman filming in the street



*Translated by Lutz Becker in *Art in Revolution* (London, The Hayward Gallery, 1971).

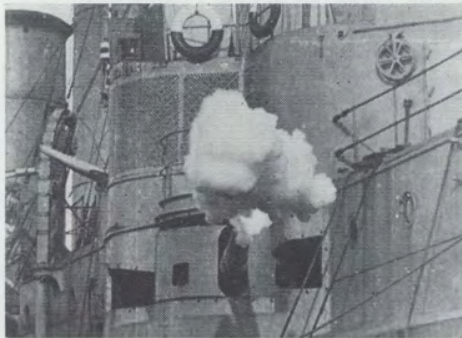
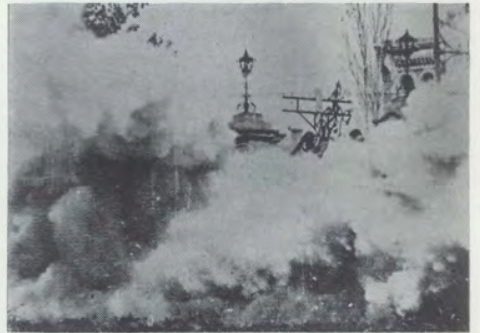
EISENSTEIN'S AESTHETICS: A Dissenting View

Paul Seydor

Everybody 'seriously interested' in film pays obeisance to Sergei Eisenstein in one way or another. Even those few critics, scholars and knowledgeable lay moviegoers who don't like his work feel compelled to preface or conclude unfavourable remarks about even its gross defects by praising his style, his craftsmanship, his cinematic sophistication and—this always—his genius (although some of the less generous among this dissenting contingent may qualify that with 'misguided' or similar euphemisms). Many *auteuristes* and other self-appointed taste-makers are more certain: Eisenstein is simply the greatest film-maker who ever lived, *Potemkin* the greatest film ever made. And so by the time one gets round to seeing *Potemkin*, the first of his movies one usually does see, one is suitably prepared. James Agee, among others, found parts of it 'as brilliantly organised as a movement in a Beethoven symphony.'

What one may be *unprepared* for is an efficiently engineered political cartoon posturing as an epic, with admitted moments of 'brilliance' even if the comparison with Beethoven is too flattering and wildly misleading. One doesn't think of Beethoven as an 'organiser', while it is hard to think of Eisenstein as anything else. Thus one comes away feeling that if *Potemkin* is what film professors and other experts insist on touting as a cinematic masterpiece, perhaps it is not altogether a bad thing that most people become interested in movies long before they see any Eisenstein; for if the latter experience were to precede the former interest, it might also preclude that interest.

The objection to this could of course be that one is led to expect too much. True enough, perhaps—Eisenstein's admirers are nothing if not ardent—but one is led to expect scarcely less, since pretentious comparisons are in order, from Beethoven's own *Eroica*, Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* and Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu*. None of which disappoint; all of which, quite to the contrary, far exceed anticipation. Perhaps



the problem is that Eisenstein's admirers are afraid to let the man and the work speak for themselves, which may explain why so many of the panegyrics to each have little to do with the actual experience of reading the one and seeing the other. Another objection, especially relevant to works whose greatness is no longer questioned or hardly even reassessed, is that the unconvinced are simply expressing preferences as to taste. Although this, too, may be true enough, short of wilful idiosyncrasy questions of taste and judgment almost always are inextricably associated with and lead inevitably to questions of aesthetics and ideology. Could the deficiencies in Eisenstein's work, literary and visual, be less in the eye that receives than in the mind that conceived? Certainly there are deficiencies in his aesthetic theories, the most telling of which are probably his method of exposition and line of reasoning ('lines' is perhaps more accurate here, for Eisenstein hardly ever hands the reader a *single line*).

Conflict is the basis of Eisenstein's aesthetics; and dialectical conflict in particular is the informing principle of montage as he first enunciated it in his early essays 'The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram' and 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form'. In the latter essay he set the groundwork for his theory:

'In the realm of art, this dialectic principle of dynamics is embodied in

CONFLICT

as the fundamental principle for the existence of every artwork and every art-form.

For art is always conflict: (1) according to its social mission, (2) according to its nature, (3) according to its methodology.'

Let us take these in order. There is a long and salutary tradition of socio-politically oriented art that goes at least as far back as the Greeks and includes such diverse works as *Paradise Lost*, *Leaves of Grass*, the novels of Zola and Dos Passos, the operas of Janáček and some of the symphonies of Shostakovich. But from another point of view, everyone is in some kind of conflict with his society, even artists like Mozart, Shakespeare and John Ford, whom we don't think of as being socially committed in the narrow political sense. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between that kind of conflict by which the artist desires only improvement of an existing social system he is otherwise happy with, and that kind of conflict aimed at revolution.

For all the social criticism in Shakespeare's plays, he was not in *dialectical*—that is to say, in Eisenstein's terms, opposing, revolutionary—conflict with Elizabethan England. Yet it is precisely dialectical conflict which Eisenstein posited as the social basis of art. He insisted on this on almost every page of 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', the title itself an example of that insistence; and he implied it in his criticism of other filmmakers, such as Griffith, of whom he said, 'nowhere in his films is there sounded a

protest against social injustice' (which, by the way, is incorrect). One wonders what Eisenstein would do with, say, a poet like Dante, who wanted to reconcile his readers to an existing order (an order he didn't want to alter, only purify)? Or, alternatively, what he would do with his own *Potemkin* and *October*. If the social basis of art is always conflict, then how could he have made these two movies, which were made after the revolution and within a social order he presumably approved of?

This raises the major ramification of his first premise: namely, if an art work is always the result of an artist's conflict with his society, what becomes of art once socialism is realised? (Some of the more extreme Marxists, it is said, believe that art is only an interim activity vaguely necessary to orient consciousness towards the desired social state but unnecessary thereafter. Marx and Engels, it should be noted, did not share this belief.) If the implications of this first premise are thoroughly pursued, after the revolution art is left with only one function—that of legitimatising the new order, a function which, however valid in and of itself, is inherently limited and ultimately stifling. It is not incidental to add that in fact legitimisation was the only function the Stalinist regime recognised and permitted its artists.

The second premise is that the nature of art is 'a conflict between natural existence and creative tendency.' Is Eisenstein stating here anything more than the truism that an artist must work his materials into a form that will clarify and communicate what he wants to say? To the extent that his materials in their raw state are more than likely not in the finished form he desires, then there is of course some conflict. But the term needs to be more precisely defined. Many artists, especially those of the romantic period and virtually all those who are genuine exponents of the organic tradition, experience nothing like dialectical conflict with their materials, mainly because nature and artistic genius are not conceived of as being essentially at odds. More exactly, the problem for the organic artist is not that of bending what Eisenstein characterised as 'passive nature' to the 'active industry' of the will, but of discovering the latent forms which an all too active nature takes.

Perhaps it is because Eisenstein, referring so often to the dynamism of his movies, fancied himself in the organic tradition that many people just took his word that he was part of it. There are enough similarities between his aesthetics and those of the organic tradition. Both involve dialectical thought; both are against 'art for art's sake', although Eisenstein, as will be shown, only nominally so; both are aware of the importance of historical continuity ('a usable past,' van Wyck Brooks called it); both ground aesthetics firmly in ideology and insist upon the social commitment of the artist. But these similarities are largely superficial. Organic artists translated social commitment, for example, mainly as a concern for relating to and expressing the on-going, *living* life of their society. For them dialecticism meant recognising and resolving, not preserving, conflict; it was a way of expressing the belief that the universe is endlessly shifting, protean,

active. Their metaphors, like André Bazin's, are usually biological and botanical. ('Give me the out-of-doors. It is a metaphor, infinite of interpretation, this out-of-doors,' wrote the great architect Louis Sullivan in *Kindergarten Chats*.) Eisenstein's metaphors, on the contrary, are mostly mechanistic, as when he said, 'I would approach the making of a film in much the same way that I would approach the equipment of a poultry farm or the installation of a water system.'

The differences are not merely rhetorical but suggest differing world views, the machine as opposed to the garden. When Eisenstein wrote, 'We are seeking a definition of the whole nature, the principal style and spirit of cinema,' he evidently believed that he was discovering eternal laws governing the making of movies. This is something a truly organic artist would never have thought to do or even thought could be done, because the belief is that there are no abiding principles in the arts. Like the universe itself, the arts are continually in flux, in transition, developing and adapting. Even Sullivan's famous axiom 'form follows function' was intended less as a dictum than as a guiding suggestion to indicate that every new art work presents a new set of problems which demand new perspectives, new solutions, new means, new forms.

Consider, for contrast, Eisenstein, who in 'Film Language' wrote:

'For those who are able, montage is the most powerful compositional means of telling a story.'

For those who do not know about composition, montage is a syntax for the *correct* construction of each particle of a film.

And lastly, montage is simply an *elemental* rule of film-orthography for those who mistakenly put together pieces of a film as one would mix ready-made recipes for medicine, or pickle cucumbers, or preserve plums, or ferment apples and cranberries together.' [emphases added]

Here is Eisenstein's own ready-made recipe. An expression is an 'inter-relation of the three phases: *Conflict within a thesis* (an abstract idea)—*formulates* itself in the dialectics of the subtitle—*forms* itself spatially in the conflict within the shot—and *explodes* with increasing intensity in the montage-conflict among the separate shots.' This, he found, is 'fully analogous to human, psychological expression', 'which can also be comprehended in three phases': 'Purely verbal utterance,' 'Gesticulatory (mimic intonational) expression,' and 'Projection of the conflict into space.'

And he rarely deviated. In his essays he usually first formulated his theme, then juxtaposed it with other themes, and finally projected it into 'space' by calling on all of culture past to shore up his argument. (The difference between Eisenstein's use of the past and an organic artist's—say Renoir's—is the difference between building upon and therefore expanding the past, and appropriating it for one's own ends and thereby diminishing it. Eisenstein would have translated Brooks' phrase as 'an exploitable past'.) He constructed his movies as he did his essays. *October*, for example, begins with an awkward formulation of revolution as a statue of the Czar falls to pieces. This is in turn later reversed (literally: the opening footage is run backward) as the Provisional Government is seen

Left: 'Battleship Potemkin'. Shots from the sequence after the Odessa Steps, in which the rebel battleship fires on the town and the stone lions are awakened

to offer more of the same. Finally the theme is projected into space by a detailed look at the ten days that led to the October Revolution. (One of the last effects is a figurative explosion: the moment the Winter Palace is taken, Eisenstein cuts in shots of clocks showing the relative hour all over the world.)

Now could anything be less organic in principle, nature, or fact than this method which Eisenstein repeatedly impasted on his movies and essays alike, or more resemble what he specifically criticised linkage as being—'bricks, arranged in series to expound an idea'? Shots are selected and combined in such a way that the montage sequence expresses what he wills it to express. What could Eisenstein possibly have been thinking of when he wrote, 'Expressionism left barely a trace on our cinema'? Certainly German expressionism wasn't to make its 'trace' manifest until the days of *Ivan the Terrible*; but *Strike*, *The General Line*, *Potemkin* and *October* are so clearly intended to express specific, paraphrasable theses that it ill behove Eisenstein to criticise the work of other film-makers as mere 'exposition' or 'a good PhD thesis'.

Eisenstein once quoted with approval a remark by Goethe to the effect that we never experience things in isolation but in spatial and temporal relationships. Superficially, it is easy to infer from this that montage is organic because its meanings depend on the relationship of its components. And Eisenstein's much-quoted rallying cry 'Away from realism to reality' seems to corroborate the organic reading of his work, because organic artists also wanted to return to life for their materials. But Eisenstein's statement needs closer examination.

For one thing, as a serious aesthetic injunction it makes no sense because he is trying to compare incomparables. Realism is a technique (at most, a genre) of expression; reality is an object of expression and can just as effectively be expressed by realism (O'Neill) as by, say, deliberate artifice (Cocteau in *La Belle et la Bête*). For another, by realism Eisenstein does mean a technique, the slavish reproduction of the external world in the theatre; by reality he means not some para-reality, as the neo-Platonic romantics did and as many of his admirers seem to think, but quite bluntly the material world. Furthermore, even that isn't absolutely certain, for he appears to think of the term as a technique of expression, and in so far as he persists in this, it becomes for him a simple extension of realism: displacing the reconstruction of the thing with the thing itself—in other words, virtually location shooting. Thus he once staged a play set in a gas factory in an actual gas factory. And as his admirers are forever pointing out, 'the sailors in *Potemkin* are real sailors . . . the heroine of *Old and New* is really a milkmaid . . .'

Admittedly, this aspect of Eisenstein's aesthetics was at least partially tenable for the silent film, and for the Russian silent film in particular (because it de-emphasised the role of the individual in favour of the masses). Purely as visual objects non-actors can carry considerable conviction because we don't have to listen to them speak. The moment Eisenstein began using sound and playing up the individual, he was forced to



Dynamism in 'Alexander Nevsky'; 'the best fake grand manner. . .' in 'Ivan the Terrible'

employ actors. Well, was there another solution, especially for the costume dramas that were his later stock in trade? A 60-year-old man may indeed, as Eisenstein once said, have had sixty years experience being sixty; but it does not follow that he has the technique and sensibility to express what it means and how it feels to be sixty.

It can be said that Eisenstein first wants to escape from theatrical art as imitation. The real thing is better. Yet when he moves into the material world, he finds himself dissatisfied with that reality and betrays it by imposing his own meanings upon it. When, in *October*, he cuts together shots of workers in a cannon factory with people starving in a wintry street, the obvious point is that war consumes resources that could be used to clothe and feed the populace. But

Eisenstein has merely stated an idea, not conveyed a felt reality, because the awesome weight of the symbolic construct crushes any potential feeling. We respond to the construct, not to the human misery that it in part wants to express.

In a sense, the problem is that Eisenstein has realised his intentions rather too well. The creation of dramatic art works, approached dialectically, involves a kind of distortion that tends to gross simplification of idea or of character on the one hand, or to abstraction on the other, or to both. Whether the dialectical dynamic is twofold, threefold or manifold, the artist is nevertheless imposing a preconceived design on his material. All dialectical art is not necessarily the worse for this, just as all organic art is not necessarily the better for its openness

(Antonioni, for example, is sometimes so open as to be formless, structureless and pointless). However, Eisenstein's peculiar combination of an abstract final cause arising out of a materialistic material cause seemed doomed to failure from the outset because the natural world, as we shall see, will almost always undercut, even contravene, the world of insistent ideology.

For the moment we can only observe that by the end of his career, Eisenstein not only had replaced non-actors with actors, but had also replaced the gas factory with the reproduction of the gas factory. He set himself to reproducing, in the best fake grand manner of which David Lean is now the exemplar, ancient castles, costumes, rooms and characters, with slavish attention to surface detail. In short, for Eisenstein, reality was just a circular route back to realism.

Yet there is no contradiction here; and maybe those who insist that Eisenstein's late work is a continuous development from his early work are right after all. The later aesthetics of slavish reproduction and heavy artifice is the logical extension of montage in general and of what Eisenstein called 'montage of attractions' in particular. For Eisenstein, nature is static and industry is active, the synthesis of this dialectic producing the dynamism of montage. But does it? Is not in fact the opposite the case—that montage, by conferring a fixed meaning on the things of nature, by carefully isolating them with the camera and then recombining them in unnatural ways in the cutting room, moves so far from dynamism as to become the very epitome of *stasis*?

Despite what he said, Eisenstein's big problem was always that nature is too fluid, too elusive, to remain in his grasp for very long. By formulating the theory of 'montage of attractions', in which all the elements at the film-maker's disposal are reduced to the same level of importance or non-importance as the case may be, Eisenstein hoped to strip things of their intrinsic meanings, which stem from the place they occupy in integral space and their relationships with other things in that space. He wanted complete control over the meaning of his films. Nature, indeed the material world in general, must of course forever be the enemy of such an aesthetic; for things do not, especially in a medium like film, readily relinquish their own character and the meanings attendant to that character.

Confronted thus with the reluctance of fact to be completely distorted, Eisenstein faced the choice of giving up either the aesthetics or the real world. He chose to give up the latter, as his later work shows; yet the solution was implicit from the beginning. For dialectical montage displaced the natural relationship things enjoy in the world with an artificial, contrived relationship which tried to impose alien meanings. This is what André Bazin meant by his devastating observation that Russian montage does not so much give us events as allude to them, and in so doing keeps us at one remove from reality.

Later, when Eisenstein was forbidden to employ montage, he found other ways to escape reality. *Nevsky* and *Ivan* have temporal settings deep in the past; while

the spatial settings moved either outside Russia (the Mexican fiasco) or, once more, away from the contemporary urban settings which distinguished his first films. Similarly his actors came to resemble people less and less, to the point that even his admirers became dubious. For James Agee, Cherkasov's Ivan is made up 'with a chin and cranium which becomes ever more pointed, like John Barrymore as Mr. Hyde.' And Dwight Macdonald observed that, 'the leading characters are men become beasts: Ivan is a lean, tired old wolf; the boyars are great fat bears billowing in furs; the two leaders of Ivan's Oprichnina police are bulls with curls low on their brutal foreheads; the wicked Efrosinia is a beaked hawk.'

The usual response to such criticism is to refer to Eisenstein's interest in cartoons, at which he was adept; or to bring up his theory of 'typage', which, as Jay Leyda pointed out, was a way of creating stock figures 'based on the need for presenting each new figure in our first glimpse of him

Birds and men. One of the police informers in 'Strike'. Below: Efrosinia as a beaked hawk in 'Ivan the Terrible'



so sharply and completely that further use of this figure may be as a known element. Thus new, immediate conventions are created.' If we discard Leyda's euphemistic description, as we confidently may, typage is revealed as nothing more sophisticated than a kind of instant stereotyping, pure caricature; and such references therefore serve to confirm rather than to deny the criticisms. *Ivan* especially is less grand opera *sans* singing, as it has been called, than an elaborate cartoon world of fantastic sets and sharp contrasts of light and shadow and ludicrous posturing by the actors. And one means to be neither facetious nor derogatory when suggesting that such celebrated sequences as the rising stone lion in *Potemkin* and the numerous icons and statuettes in *October* juxtaposed to make them appear to move, are essentially creations of a cartoon sensibility. That is, a mind more interested in creating motion (and *comotion*) by symbolising movement than in observing movement by allowing animate objects freedom to move. Here is Eisenstein:

'I claim that every object is a dead object even though it has moved before the camera. For movement before the camera is not movement before the screen. It is no more than raw material for the future building up of *real* movement [emphasis added], which is obtained by the assemblage of the various strips of film.'

Although as he grew older, Eisenstein wrote more and more about synchronising the senses, his films, despite the rather conventional use of sound, relied so heavily on visual expression that Pauline Kael could remark quite accurately of *Ivan*, 'It's a great collection of stills.' And in the final analysis it is the visual style which tells all. Eisenstein's was always a style that relied heavily, and to some tastes excessively, on the close-up. But in the early films there is some balance among the kinds of shots so that there is a moderately varied dynamic range. In the later films, however, and especially in *Ivan*, close-ups dominate to the point of making the work monotonously intense, which is perhaps the other side of being intensely monotonous. They not only press us closer to the film, but more significantly they eliminate space.

Whereas film-makers as stylistically dissimilar as Renoir, Welles, Peckinpah and Kurosawa use close-ups to italicise or otherwise detail aspects of a larger world the integral sense of which is never lost, Eisenstein used them to dissolve spatial relationships—to dissolve, in other words, that reality which, as Bazin pointed out, is the one 'common denominator between the cinematographic image and the world we live in': 'the reality of space.' This is true of *Ivan* despite the archly framed and artfully composed full and long shots. For in them the objects, especially the characters, achieve another kind of anonymity, where they go and how they stand being determined less by who they are and what they do than by how they'll look once they get there.

But it was no different in the early films, only differently achieved. What unites the early and late films is the absence of integral space. What separates them is Eisenstein's conception of montage and the way the films are experienced. His first formulation of montage was thoroughly dialectical: montage was the conflict between two or more

dissimilar shots placed side by side, giving rise to an 'invisible' movement or space supplied by the viewer. Editing was the central device without which dialectical montage could not exist. 'Conflict within the shot is [only] potential montage,' Eisenstein warned. The effects depended upon the obliteration of space, on the very absence of integral space, because the viewer was, ideally, expected to make the desired connections between shots, these connections in turn becoming the context (i.e., displacing integral space) in which relationships would be seen and evaluated. Eisenstein's early cinema is quintessentially a cinema of (though not necessarily for) the mind. Space and movement are not literally seen, that is, are not on the screen: they exist only in the viewer's imagination, his eye serving to register the details with which his mind will make the 'proper' points.

Subsequently Eisenstein broadened montage to include conflict within the shot, and then to include virtually every conceivable relationship of elements in a film (e.g., sound to image, object to camera, and so forth), which only broadened its meaning right out of existence. Since every art work must have internal relationships, filmmakers as disparate as Godard, Wyler, Hitchcock and Vigo, indeed, anyone who makes movies, become exponents of montage. Moreover, Eisenstein's original montage could be achieved only through dissonance; later, presumably even harmonious relationships qualified as montage. It is no wonder that, as William S. Pechter has observed, 'Hollywood reduced the meaning of "montage" to a special-effects sequence. In France and Italy, it just means editing.'

The implications are, however, more far-reaching than merely semantic. No one would deny that contrasts of lighting, volume, plane and size are in some sense conflicts, but are they *felt* as such? When they are combined in a single shot, they are generally experienced as contrasts that contribute to a unified composition. This is because the eye is, as McLuhan has shown us, a neutral organ and works to unify and resolve tensions in a single image. The eye needs a stimulus to jar its inherent neutrality, and cutting was originally that stimulus and was what gave Eisenstein's early films their particular energy and occasional attention-riveting suspense. In the later films, without the dialectical cutting and without a larger world fully imagined by the director, there is just about nothing for the viewer to do but sit in awe as a seemingly endless series of impressive photographs is paraded before him.

When Eisenstein abandoned his original conception of montage, he just kept on using his painterly style of within-the-shot composition, apparently unable to develop a fluid, open, flexible approach that would replace the excitement of dialectical montage with another kind of excitement, more exploratory and searching, allowing the eye to roam about the frame and to follow observed movement. These days it doesn't seem to matter much, then, whether one prefers the stupefied amazement of watching *Ivan* or the coercive nervousness of watching *Potemkin*; in one we're given nothing to do, in the other we're always being forced to do something. Ironically, the actual result of Eisenstein's late montage is about the

same as that of his early montage: an expressionism that expressed nothing so much as maniacal formalism.

Still, there is no denying the great moments. The disfiguring by a bullet of a woman's face in *Potemkin* is truly shocking; and the most celebrated sequence of *October*, the July Days demonstrations, works spectacularly well, perhaps because the montage techniques genuinely serve and grow out of the material. For example, the rapid cutting between shots of the machine-gun barrel, the gunner, and a fuller shot of the gunner, really does achieve an aural effect of clatter. And the dead horse-drawbridge sequence is certainly impressively staged and brilliantly organised. One may admire such effects for their obvious artistry and yet feel shamed at the same time, as Robert Warshaw did, for the readiness with which Eisenstein was willing to appropriate the deaths of real people and the actuality of historical events for his own purposes.



'October': '...that flaxen hair gradually slipping away and that horse dangling over the edge'

And one could question as well the glaring disparity between the naturalism of what is in the shots and the artifice of their combinations. One could ask, for example, why we see only one horse-drawn carriage during the demonstrations, while there are thousands of people milling around and while we are in the centre of the city. Why do both the horse and the girl's hair span the jointure of the drawbridge? How is it that the bourgeois soldier and his girl friend are able to continue making love oblivious to the panic and shooting and screaming around them? Why is the background in the close-up of the gunner black when he is firing in broad daylight?

The obvious answer is that Eisenstein could not have created his effects and racked up his polemical points without such discontinuities, inconsistencies, contradictions and contrivances. The raising of the drawbridge would be seen as a simple and logical tactical procedure instead of as this enormous ideological hyperbole contrived

to express the oppression and brutality of the bourgeoisie and the heroism and dignity of the masses—meanings all tacked on by that flaxen hair gradually slipping away and that horse dangling over the edge. If one has any feel for this sort of thing, one knows as soon as the drawbridge begins to be raised and the horse slumps over the edge that the beast isn't going to drop loose until the bridge reaches the zenith of its ascent. One may know this, yet sit there responding helplessly in breathless anticipation. Eisenstein was a brilliant organiser.

But the real question to be asked of these effects is: what is the operative logic, the organising principle, behind them? The answer is that it is fundamentally not humanistic or ideological or political or socialistic—although it may be any of these in passing. Fundamentally, it is aesthetic. Primary value is placed upon, everything is swept before, purely formal beauty. Stalin had some cause to be concerned, given the prevailing notion of what art was supposed to do in Russia, a notion Eisenstein paid frequent lip service to. And his admirers rarely helped matters by raving less about what he did than about how he did it. Dwight Macdonald wrote, 'Mob scenes have never been so convincingly done as here,' adding, 'the propagandistic bias is unimportant alongside [the] fidelity to art and nature.'

Well, less faithful to truth perhaps than to beauty, Eisenstein's aestheticism being most clearly evidenced by the extent to which the two can be separated in his movies. He is usually never less convincing than when he is trying to do something else than create a purely beautiful sequence. Thus in *October* we are subjected to such witless jape as Kerensky becoming a peacock and then a Napoleon. Or consider the Kerensky-Kornilov sequence which Eisenstein said is supposed to express General Kornilov's 'militarist tendency', which 'could be shown in a montage that would employ religious details for its material.' Does anybody but the most dogged specialist—say, a biographer of Kornilov, if he ever had one—infer that from the sequence? In fact this sequence, as a whole the most complicated and opaque in the film, is also the one which receives the most gingerly treatment by the film's enthusiasts.

Much easier to deal with, if only because so embarrassingly clear in meaning, are such effects as the Mensheviks juxtaposed with the harpists, an effect Eisenstein himself denounced as too literary; and the conversion of the cycle corps depicted by an 'abstract' shot of several suspended spinning bicycle wheels, an effect he was rather pleased with. Although neither one is especially pleasing, the former, despite its clumsiness, is much closer to Eisenstein's notion of transference montage because there is a genuine transfer of meaning between dissimilar objects; whereas with the latter, neither new meaning nor new information is added by the inserted abstract image.

If a rampant aestheticism was the result of montage, it was not its motivation. Eisenstein elected expressionism over impressionism because he wanted to create 'a purely intellectual film'. His greatest ambition

was evidently to film *Das Kapital*, and to that end he moved away from realism to reality and then away from reality too. Yet what other direction could he take to realise such a cinema, 'freed from traditional limitations [since Eisenstein wrote this in 1929, one wonders what 'tradition' he has in mind], achieving direct forms for ideas, systems and concepts, without any need for transitions and paraphrases,' except that by which he could completely transcend the material world with its copious and distracting associations, intrusions, surprises, mysteries and ambiguities?

Eisenstein desired as well a completely visceral cinema. He once said he wasn't interested in 'kino-eye', he was after 'kino-fist'. And in one essay declared: 'The film's job is to make the audience "help itself", not to "entertain" it. To grip, not to amuse. To furnish the audience with cartridges, not to dissipate the energies that it brought into the theatre.' To which faintly fascist end he studied Pavlov, hoping to discover a system of infallible stimuli that would make audiences salivate, and in which he was at least somewhat successful. Aware as we may be of how we're manipulated, it's nevertheless difficult not to respond to his early films. Eisenstein knew how to work on our nervous systems, and we react to each mercilessly placed cue.

These twin emphases on cerebral and visceral response have evidently puzzled many of his admirers, who try desperately to reconcile the two by saying that we're supposed to respond emotionally first and then to think about it later. But within the terms of Eisenstein's aesthetics, this is impossible. By making us respond first, he has made us act; and an act is an irrevocable commitment that cannot be reneged upon. *Potemkin* and *October* and *Nevsky* are less intellectual machines designed to make us think (much less to 'make manifest the contradictions of Being') than celebrations of key events in the formation of the socialist state. Like their analogous pageants in primitive societies, in which the people 'understood', say, the creation of the world by re-enacting it as a ritual, these movies are meant to involve the spectator at the most instinctual, sub-intellectual level. For what are these movies anyway but socio-political legitimisation, and not to the ends of understanding and awareness but to force assent and affirmation?

In this sense, one could take issue with Macdonald and argue that far from being unsuited to a totalitarian society, Eisensteinian montage is uniquely suited to it; for its latent message is to act as we are told, no, *made*, to act. (Could this be what Lenin had in mind when he said that of all the arts cinema was the most important to the revolution?) Think about it later if we must, which of course means don't think about it at all, for there never is any 'later' since we have already symbolically acted by responding. In any case, even if we were disposed to think about it later, we couldn't do so except by going outside the framework of the films because they are closed systems. The only context for evaluation is the network of associations drawn by dialectical montage, which eliminates potential ambiguities and along with them the possibilities for scepticism and doubt. This is why Eisenstein's cinema can be called a

cinema of but not for the mind.

Ultimately, Eisenstein discovering montage is not unlike T. S. Eliot rediscovering classicism. Each artist's aesthetic represents a search for authority—Eisenstein's political, Eliot's religious—in the face of an overwhelming fear of the individual and his freedom. Especially feared is the artist and his creative imagination, which must forever be subversive of all systems and all imposed authority. Thus we find Eisenstein, in the most significantly revealing of his many painful apologies to the Stalinist government, admitting that he forgot to 'fully subordinate [his] creations to the interest of the education of the Soviet people.'

'From this aim we must take not one step aside nor deviate a single iota. We must master the Lenin-Stalin method of perceiving reality and history so completely and profoundly that we shall be able to overcome all remnants and survivals of former ideas which, though long ago banished from consciousness, strive stubbornly and cunningly to steal into our works whenever our creative vigilance relaxes for a single moment.'

In this light it is of course not flattering to Eisenstein to see him as the cinematic equivalent to Eliot, for it makes him less the great revolutionary artist of the screen than one of the most repressive, conservative and—there's no other word—genteel. Eisenstein wants to realise no ideals; rather he wants to idealise the real, which may be why Warshaw called his films 'a triumph of art over humanity'. Eisenstein's attempts to move us emotionally are virtually without exception sheer bathos. He is never more pathetic than when he is desperately trying to open his heart; far from infusing the screen, it remains firmly attached to his sleeve, which is perhaps the best place for it, safely divorced from mind and body.

Scenes like the death of Vakulinchuk, the slaughter of the demonstrators, the trampling of the little boy on the Odessa steps, the martyred horse and girl and the starving workers in *October*, are either so aggressively sentimental or so ruthlessly didactic that one sits unmoved and suspicious. For sentimentality is rarely more than an excessive display of feeling where little or

none exists to begin with; and, as Leavis has shown us, the form of an art work almost always offers the clearest indication of its sincerity. When Eisenstein pins the note 'for a spoonful of soup' to Vakulinchuk's body, he forfeits all claims to sensitivity: this is life, and death, in the service of art, and ideology.

Not that life will be cheated of the last word. A movie is inevitably a record of some aspect of nature, even if, as in Eisenstein's later movies, it is reduced to walk-on status in the form of a few exterior shots and the faces of the actors; and it will always subvert the attempts of directors to impose meanings that are not there or to remove meanings that are there. The most obvious, at least the most revealing, instance of this subversion in Eisenstein's films is the scene in *October* where a Bolshevik soldier enters the Czarina's bedroom. He sees some trinkets and knick-knacks on a night stand, a silly painting of Christ blessing the Czar and his family, some bed-clothes, presumably made of silk or other fine cloth. For a moment he is transfixed, uncomprehending and dazed by the splendour, richness and suffocating beauty of the room. He stares at a pillow pierced by the end of his bayonet; feels it; then, with a look of disgust, begins to tear it to shreds.

Doubtless Eisenstein meant us to respond sympathetically, to approve when the young soldier smashes and tears and rages at this corrupt, decadent opulence. But the scene suggests more than that. The soldier's revulsion is not directed only at the spectacle of ill-gotten wealth, and it is not motivated only by a sense of social injustice. It is, rather, directed at *all* finery and grace and delicacy; and what is revealed is less the cheerful solidarity of the masses than their ugly philistinism—manifested here as a frightening ignorance become stupidity that destroys what it cannot understand. Life takes its revenge, all right. It was this same philistinism in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the inception of which Eisenstein had so lately celebrated in *October*, that would not long afterwards censure, conscript and ultimately squelch 'difficult' artists like himself in the name of history.

'Alexander Nevsky'





'La Nuit Américaine': Above: studio street scene. Below: film within film

Jan Dawson

TRUFFAUT'S STAIRY NIGHT

In all of Truffaut's films, love has either fed or foundered on the unexpected. Its finer ecstasies have been reserved for those rare beings who combined inflexibility of purpose with an infinite adaptability to capricious change. Louis Mahé, the hero of *La Sirène du Mississippi*, provides the model of *l'amour fou* in its purest form: a man who assimilates his wife's lies, theft and betrayal to his own consuming passion for her, and who—even as he knowingly swallows the poisoned potion she's prepared for him—can wholeheartedly declare: 'Je ne regrette rien.' True love, as he explains to his startled nemesis, is at once a joy and a suffering.

Now Truffaut has filmed the trials and tribulations of his own love story. And although the heady romantic image of the doomed lover stumbling through snowdrifts towards an impossible happiness may at first seem a far cry from an entry in the film-maker's year book, Truffaut unforcedly makes the connection in what is at once his most personal and least intimate film to date. *Day for Night* is a film about film-making.

More specifically, since its director has never been one to dabble in abstractions, about the making in the moribund Victorine studios at Nice of *Je vous présente Pamela*, a tidy saga of adultery, incest and revenge.

Films, as *Pamela's* director Ferrand (Truffaut thinly disguised by a deaf-aid) tries explaining to his ostentatiously temperamental juvenile lead Alphonse (an even more thinly disguised Jean-Pierre Léaud),

are tidier and more harmonious than life: they run smoothly, like trains in the night, whereas life off-screen is full of obstacles, delays and traffic jams. *La Nuit Américaine* playfully counterpoints the chaos of the raw ingredients with the smoothness of the finished product, joyfully celebrating the cinema's power to transmute the first into the second and no less joyfully demonstrating some of the technical ruses which make its alchemy so successful.

Its opening shots show a Paris street on a rather grey day, with traffic circulating and a small crowd emerging from the Métro. Then, on a shout of 'cut', a crane shot reveals not only meridional palm trees, blue sky and a model studio street, but also the camera crane from which we had, as it were, just been looking. A crane shot of a crane shot is no mean achievement. And as Truffaut continues to unmask the artifices of his art, one is overwhelmed by the realisation that every card he lays on the table is matched by another up his sleeve: that *Pamela's* cast, each furnished with a dual identity as simplified character and complex performer, are portrayed by actors inevitably trailing other problems than those they express on the screen; that the vast army of



visible technicians with whose complicated personal and professional problems we are soon intimately acquainted are in fact actors, themselves observed by a second army of 'real' technicians. To say nothing of the fact that the man playing the director is of course directing himself.

Truffaut, however, is not concerned with building a hall of mirrors but rather with drawing a parallel between technical hitches and emotional upheavals, and with showing the haphazard way in which the cinema triumphs over both. All eight takes of the Paris street scene turn out to have been destroyed during a power failure at the labs; and by the time it—and the requisite 150 extras—can be slotted into the schedule, one of the principal actors involved has been killed in a car crash. His demise, and the insurance company's refusal to finance reshooting his scenes with another actor, means that the elaborate costume-ball sequence which involved so many sleepless nights must now be consigned to the cutting-room floor, and that the street sequence must be modified to allow for the use of a double. Never mind, someone says, it might look better in the snow. Suddenly, on the sunny Riviera, a snow-making machine is busy transforming a Paris street. And of course it does look much better in the snow, even though we realise that, like the rain dropped from sprinklers on to the window of a backless bungalow or the fire which was extinguished by a hand reaching down the chimney, it's just another calculated illusion.

Death is, of course, the most extreme obstacle around which the film director has to improvise. And in *La Nuit Américaine*, it is not merely ironic (Alexandre, the character in question, specialised in death scenes and was untimely prevented from being gunned down in *Pamela*) but also a trifle symbolic. Truffaut's film is dedicated to Dorothy and Lillian Gish; and despite Ferrand's topical complaints that all of Nice's 37 cinemas appear to be showing *The Godfather*, or his cameraman's remark about seeing Julie/Pamela (played by Jacqueline Bisset) in a film with a good car chase, it's more affectionately concerned with the kind of movies they're not supposed to make any more. The nostalgia of the studio setting is made explicit in Ferrand's voice-over comments, in the course of which he equates the death of the elderly 'continental lover' (played by Jean-Pierre Aumont) with the closing down of the studios, the end of stars and scripts alike.

Less portentously, the film also interweaves and revives two favourite Hollywood standbys: that of the bunch of people trying against fantastic odds to put on a show; and that of the group of equally weighted characters thrown together in some isolated setting. The aptly named Hôtel Atlantique which serves as the unit's base is witness to enough heartaches, corridor dramas and unexpected couplings to provide material for more than one *Grand Hotel*. And while the film's title refers specifically to the day for night shooting process (one more *trompe l'œil* effect), its literal meaning also applies, not least when the sounds of the hotel's busy switchboard are superimposed on the image of its tranquil, night-time façade.

Fortunately, the traumatic disclosures of the average American night are filtered through Truffaut's traditionally Gallic and obstinately rose-coloured spectacles. While *Pamela*'s stars treat their personal dramas with a despairing histrionic intensity, their creator contrives to construct comic set-pieces from even their most costly departures from form and schedule. Unaccustomed to memorising dialogue in her native Italy (with Federico she just recites numbers and dubs the words in afterwards), the specialist in abandoned wives (Valentina Cortese) has to have her text pinned up at strategic points around the set, but is still too befuddled by alcohol to make her exit through the correct door. With each retake, there's an element of suspense worthy of Hitchcock, as we wonder whether she'll manage the moves which we, like the crew, are now willing her to make. When she finally dissolves in tears and the day's shooting has to be abandoned, we're just about to concur with the scriptgirl's view that she's a pain in the ass when someone explains that her son is dying of leukaemia.

Then the scriptgirl runs off with the English stuntman, and the inconsolable Alphonse seems so determined to walk off the picture that, in an excess of professional zeal, Julie goes to bed with him. Alphonse phones the news through to her absent husband, and there's further suspense when he disappears and Julie shows signs of relapsing into the breakdown from which she has only just recovered and for which the production is not insured. But Alphonse is found unharmed, driving a model car in a children's amusement park; and Julie finally breaks her tearful silence to request a tub of country butter, which the producer is obliged to fabricate by kneading together several conventionally shaped packets with his bare hands. (Truffaut insists that he hadn't seen *Last Tango* when he shot this sequence, but his audience probably will have done.)

'Qu'est-ce que c'est ce métier, où tout le monde couche avec tout le monde! Où tout le monde se tutoie! Où tout le monde ment! Où tout le monde fait semblant!' If the immorality of the profession is vehemently denounced by the unit manager's grim-faced wife, who guarantees his fidelity by knitting away on a camp stool parked within inconvenient inches of the cameras, it is also affectionately justified. Formally, in Alexandre's discussion with Julie's husband, who diagnoses the artist's insatiable need for love as an extension of his professional dependence on other people's judgment ('tout le monde a peur d'être jugé; mais dans votre métier, le jugement fait partie de la vie'); less explicitly, in Truffaut's presentation of his cast and crew as one large but temporary family, compounded inevitably of unique and temporary beings. Alphonse spends most of the film tormentedly asking his male elders whether women are really magic. But it's Julie who provides the answer when she explains that either nobody's magic or everyone is, men and women both. The magic and ephemeral family circle is clearly the ideal place for stolen kisses.

It is none the less held together by a kind of paternal conjurer, who can listen down the phone to fragments of the music score

from Paris while examining a selection of props and wigs, and who seems able to assimilate every chance and accident to his own elastic vision: a rather horrendous hotel vase is deftly removed to the living-room set, where its blue indeed shows to greater advantage; and words which Julie confides to Ferrand at the height of her private crisis are written down and handed back to her as the text for Pamela's most dramatic scene. Yet though he is obliged to display the director as a creature of infinite dexterity, Truffaut is too modest a film-maker to celebrate his own achievements. Ferrand's linking commentary betrays more self-doubt than complacency ('Shooting a film is like setting out on a stagecoach in the Far West. At first you hope you'll have a good journey, but you're soon wondering whether you'll even reach your destination'). He defines a film-maker as 'someone who is constantly asking himself questions about everything,' not as someone who has found the answers. For *La Nuit Américaine* is a love song to the cinema, not the cinéaste, and even when Ferrand is seen sleeping alone in his monastic bed, there is no suggestion of any moral superiority over his cast or crew.

In his sleep, he is troubled by nightmares in which he is interrogated about not indulging in more modish genres ('Why don't you make political films? Why don't you make erotic films?'). He is also subject to a bizarre, serialised dream (expressionistically shot in black-and-white) in which a young boy hobbles on a stick along a deserted street, then reaches a cinema, then finally uses his stick to steal the display stills from *Citizen Kane*.

Beyond the cheery recognition that private life is a mess, that everyone needs—and deserves—love and attention, what binds Ferrand most closely to his associates is this deep, dream-haunting love of film—the product and the process. Off duty, the crew hang around the hotel lounge, watching a TV movie quiz and beating the contestants to the draw. Even the self-centred Alphonse is outraged when his flighty girl friend suggests that it would be nice to go out to a restaurant rather than a cinema. And when the girl friend elopes halfway through the shooting, it's Ferrand's assistant who neatly summarises the proper moral priorities: 'Moi, pour un film je pourrais quitter un type, mais pour un type je pourrais jamais quitter un film.'

It's hard, after so spectacular a synthesis of his earlier themes, to imagine just what Truffaut can do for an encore. He himself has followed his irrefutable demonstration of just why the show must go on by announcing that he intends, for the next two years, to absent himself from the felicity of film-making, to take time out to prepare new conjuring tricks. It seems a sensible scheme, and with any other artist one could take the promised period of gestation at face value. But Truffaut has tried before, and failed, to stay away from his first love, just as Louis Mahé tried and failed to break free of the spell of his Mississippi siren. In *La Nuit Américaine*, Truffaut has shown that there's one type of *amour fou* that need not have a tragic ending, that indeed need have no ending at all. What he has yet to show is that it can endure a long separation.

Jean-Pierre Léaud talks to Jan Dawson

Jean-Pierre Léaud first appeared on the screen in 1959, playing the young Antoine Doinel in *Les Quatre Cents Coups*. He was then fourteen. Now, at the age of 29, he's in the somewhat anomalous position of having emerged as a star primarily through his work with auteur directors (Godard, Truffaut, Skolimowski, Rivette, Garrel, Bertolucci), directors who are in one sense the real stars of their films. In Truffaut's films Léaud even manages to sound like Truffaut; in Godard's his voice is much harder, more like Godard's own. It's tempting to imagine him at the centre of some tug-of-war between diametrically opposed directors. In fact, he seems to have a remarkably happy gift for absorbing contradictions.



GETTING BEYOND THE LOOKING GLASS

LEAUD: I think that an actor is essentially a receptive vessel, that his first concern must be not to distort the director's ideas if he can possibly help it. So it's important for me to work with strong directors, and to feel thoroughly in sympathy with their ideas. Of course, that could leave you with very little sense of your own identity. I've only recently begun to understand that I have to impose myself on my work, rather than transform myself for it. I'm learning to exploit my own past emotions. In so far as it requires you to dig deep into yourself, being an actor is rather like being an archaeologist. And acting is a profession which calls for a certain philosophical detachment. You have to learn to discipline yourself, but ultimately it's not a question of work—it's a question of grace. In one sense, we're a little like beggars.

I've always been a compulsive moviegoer. I got my basic training as an actor by going to the cinema, and you could say that I became an actor out of a love for filmmakers. Renoir especially. And I've been lucky to work mostly with directors, like Truffaut, Godard and Rivette, who come from a similar background. Of course they are vastly different people, but they're all concerned with achieving a kind of *authenticity*, they all have a sense of what life is really about.

In real life I'm not interchangeable with Antoine Doinel, but I don't resent living in his shadow. He was the person who taught me to become an actor. It's between the ages of about fourteen and thirty that a man's character is really formed. There's a



Top: Léaud in 1973, as the simulated deaf-mute in Jacques Rivette's *'Out One Spectre'*. Above: Léaud in 1959, in *'Les Quatre Cents Coups'*.

passage in Cocteau's writing where he talks about the camera's power 'to capture death at work'. I think there's a documentary side to Truffaut's Doinel films that's often overlooked: the character's physical and moral transformation.

I have a wonderful relationship with Truffaut, and working with him is really more like a holiday for me. But there are a

lot of differences between us. The principal one is that he's interested in living things, while I'm more attracted to metaphysics and abstractions. He reads detective stories and I read philosophy. Kant, especially. Not that it's really so abstract. If you read a passage from Kant in front of a camera, it becomes something concrete, it's not abstract any more. Godard knew that.



Léaud (playing the actor) and Truffaut (playing the director) in 'La Nuit Américaine'

Recently, Léaud has been involved in two very different kinds of production: Jean Eustache's 'La Maman et la Putain', and the French television serial of Flaubert's 'Education Sentimentale', in which his performance as Frédéric Moreau came in for some rather severe criticism.

As so often happens, I was criticised for doing just what I had intended to do. People complained because Frédéric had the same facial expression at the end as he did at the beginning. But that was what I wanted. I read the novel very carefully, and it seemed to me that the point about Frédéric was how little changed he was by everything that happened to him. He never really took stock of all those upheavals going on around him; he just went on living inside his own dreams. So I tried to make him very 'interiorised', very self-conscious about every gesture. It wasn't nearly theatrical enough for television, because most TV actors go for a style that's halfway between cinema and theatre.

It wasn't just that the director was not as strong as the film-makers I'm used to working with. Rather, that I felt Flaubert was the real director. I think that if I had to appear in another adaptation from a novel I would still try, behind the hero, to reconstruct something of the author's own biography.

With *La Maman et la Putain*, it was a different kind of problem. It called for an enormous effort. Partly because I don't have a particularly good memory, and Jean Eustache was adamant that the text had to be just the way he'd written it, down to the last comma. We also only had a month to shoot it in, and the schedule and the budget together meant that we couldn't afford more than a couple of takes for any one shot. And in a further effort to save time and money, all those long duologues weren't shot in

sequence—which of course would have given me some feedback from the actress involved. Instead, Eustache would shoot all my speeches at one go, then do the same with the other character, and then intercut the two takes. I think that's one reason why my performance seems a bit stiff. I'm not used to talking into a camera non-stop for ten or fifteen minutes; and I was also having to concentrate very hard to remember my lines.

There was more than one element of self-sacrifice in my performance. Not so much because this was the first time I had been required to play an unsympathetic character—though I did try to get a little humility into my performance, to make the character a little younger and so play down his more objectionable side. But more because I couldn't stop thinking about the audience, who were going to have to listen to all that dialogue. I know that I've been accused of gabbling in the film, and now I've seen it I realise that's a fair comment. But even so, the picture is three and a half hours long, and I felt I had some obligation to the audience to get through my lines as quickly as I could. Otherwise, it would have gone on all day! But in fact every film has its own rhythm. And even when an actor may feel that his dialogue is some kind of straitjacket, his job is to serve the text, to make it come to life. And I admired what Eustache was doing, the critical view of human behaviour that he was trying to get across. I think that on any film there has to be a kind of love link between the actor and the director.

Yes, I have worked in the theatre, but only once. With Bourseiller, at Avignon. But I missed the camera terribly, that eye of death that Cocteau was talking about. What I couldn't stand was the fact that stage actors can't just give their best performance, they have to bend the performance to suit the public. I think it's important to overcome that need to seduce an audience.

So I found working in the theatre slightly obscene. A bit like striptease.

Cannes, the press conference for *La Maman et la Putain*, was the first time I had ever been interviewed. In one sense, it was like working in the theatre again, putting on a performance but still trying to be sincere. Because, as well as performing, you also had to defend something you loved. It also teaches you to improvise.

The scene with Dani [who plays the continuity girl] in *La Nuit Américaine* was improvised, and Garrel's *La Concentration* was totally improvised, and shot in a single take. He constructed this rather meta-physical set, which consisted simply of a large bed with mirrors on either side of it, and at the back of the set there was a black hole with a little lamp in it, and corridors all round where the camera could travel. We shot that in 48 hours without a break. There was just this set, Zouzou and me... wearing nothing but a microphone and my underpants. I didn't only have to invent the text but also the meaning of the scene, as well as the movements. Because moves which look fine when you're fully dressed can seem really grotesque when you're practically naked.

I know a lot of actors want to become directors, and I can see the attraction of being in control of all the elements. But I'm very satisfied with being an actor. Besides, no one ever comments on the fact that all directors want to become actors. When I was working with Skolimowski it was easy, even though there was a language problem and I couldn't imitate his voice. Because he acts all the scenes for you. I'd just stand behind him imitating his gestures, and then sprinkle on a little Léaud powder for the cameras.

Apart from Sami Frey, I can't think of very many actors whom I admire, but I can think of a lot of actresses. Jeanne Moreau, of course; and Bernadette Lafont. She has managed to keep herself intact. I think that acting is really more of a woman's profession; being charming comes more naturally to women, whereas it's somehow rather immodest in a man. But the more films you make, the more you realise that you have to be aware of the people you're acting with, that you have to grow beyond the narcissistic stage of performing just for yourself and the director. We have to get beyond the looking-glass. Acting is a profession in which it is more and more essential to be concerned with other people.

Also, I know that I have a physical need to go on making films; I more or less suffocate when I'm not working. And that I need to keep my private life very calm and peaceful, so that I can give all the energy I've got to the director. It doesn't come naturally, but I am trying to keep my life free from problems; to reserve my strong emotions for the cinema.

What else? The only other film I've completed is a French Western, directed by Luc Moullet and edited by Eustache, called *Une Nouvelle Aventure de Billy the Kid*. It's basically a burlesque; Billy is a total drag. It's very physical, there isn't much dialogue... we were interested in people who use their bodies to express themselves. I suppose you could describe it as a kind of French Jerry Lewis, complete with grimaces.

MEAN



STREETS:

THE SWEETNESS OF HELL

David Denby

Mean Streets, Martin Scorsese's independent, low-budget feature about four sub-Mafia punks in New York's Little Italy, was the hit of the 11th New York Film Festival (along with Truffaut's *Day for Night*), and has been widely described—even by people not much taken with it—as one of the most interesting American features of 1973. By common consent, 1973 has been a dull year for American movies (at least through early November), so perhaps this accolade conceals an insult; nevertheless, the movie has built up considerable goodwill. People want to like it, they want to be generous towards it, an impulse that has led to a certain genteel condescension among several of the American reviewers.

Yet no movie deserves condescension less. Certainly it's a 'little' New York film (\$550,000 budget), with no stars and not much variety or glamour in the settings—in some respects the movie is the culmination of the lonely-streets-and-sullen-bedrooms style of student films produced in the last decade at New York University, where Scorsese, now thirty, was once a student and then a film teacher*. But emotionally, *Mean Streets* is grandiose and amazingly intense—'operatic' (as Pauline Kael has said) in the manner of mid-Visconti, yet peculiarly American in its speed, energy, obscenity and humour. And Scorsese is no sweet little talent, but a large, dangerous and deeply flawed talent.

The Godfather revealed the crime aristocrats building their empires and plotting against one another; perhaps one reason for its fantastic popularity was that it brought us close to the kind of total amoral power that obsesses the age, and gave us the illusion of understanding that power. Yet *The Godfather* was disingenuous in so far as it implied that all Mafia operations took place on this exalted level and that the Mafia had no victims outside its own ranks.

Mean Streets shows what *The Godfather*

left out—the neighbourhood chisellers, loan sharks and screw-ups who prey on their own community and each other, sucking money out of ordinary people, hustling for ten-dollar bills. Scorsese's Mulberry Street punks are only hanging on to the edges of organised crime, but the Mafia provides the system of values they live by and even a certain legitimacy, should they want it. For Charlie (Harvey Keitel), the film's hero, torn between disreputable friends and a stern Mafia uncle, 'maturity' would mean running

a restaurant that has been extorted from its rightful owner. But Charlie isn't really committed to crime, it's simply the easiest, most congenial activity in his neighbourhood—a way of staying close to friends. Thus the first effect of Scorsese's revision of the classical gangster film is to take crime out of the semi-mythical realm of monstrous ambition and the moralistic realm of low-life despair. In *Mean Streets*, crime is just a way of getting by.

As Scorsese introduces his people in short, character-revealing vignettes, for one dismaying moment you might think he was making a conventional 'wacky' caper picture about bumblers who want to be gangsters, or possibly an American *Big Deal on Madonna Street*. But it turns out that he doesn't need satire to ingratiate his characters with the audience; Scorsese, who grew up in Little Italy and obviously knows the scene, discovers the humour in the life itself and in the characters' naturally obscene idiom. And because he doesn't see these bums as 'little' people, but rather as very familiar friends who got bogged down, his film has none of the patronising, sentimental tone of bourgeois American movies about the working class (e.g. *Marty*). Pursuing his friends relentlessly in and out of bars, bedrooms and restaurants, up and down streets, stairways and hallways, he creates a life of crazy restlessness that we soon realise is totally satisfying to the characters, even though it's oppressively enclosed, barely touching on the world outside. They do little but drink, brawl, hassle over money and pick up girls who wander downtown, but their lives are inherently dramatic none the less because of the violent way honour, obsession and guilt bind them to one another. Why should we care about these working-class hoods, asked some of the film's colder reviewers. But it's hard to see in this question anything but class bias and squeamishness; the reasons for caring are there in almost every scene.

Scorsese and his co-screenwriter Mardik Martin are weak on narrative construction, but they have a preternatural instinct for the psychology of dependent relationships. For once, the male friendship theme is developed with enough psychological richness to explain the emotions it generates; this time no one will suspect something embarrassing has been left out (as people did suspect in the case of *Midnight Cowboy* and *Scarecrow*). The hero, Charlie, is a suffering, masochistic Catholic, a man who constantly must sin to fulfil his sense of unworthiness. Eternally guilty, eternally repentant, Charlie works out his pain by taking care of two troublesome friends—Teresa (Amy Robinson), an epileptic girl who loves him, and the reckless, perverse, tragically incoherent Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro).

For each of these two men, the other's character becomes a necessary fate. Charlie, the Mulberry Street Jesus, needs that lying, cheating punk Johnny Boy for personal absolution just as Johnny Boy needs Charlie to keep himself alive; the men's edgy, murderously unstable love for each other holds the film in tension. Charlie

**Mean Streets* is Scorsese's third feature; he previously directed *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1968) and *Boxcar Bertha* (1972).



tries to protect Johnny Boy from another friend, Michael (Richard Romanus), who wears suits and long dark coats with felt collars and has pretensions as a very deadly *mafioso*; the trouble with Michael is that he's as much a punk as any of the others, although he doesn't know it. Desperately eager to impress his friends, Michael turns to violence when Johnny Boy contemptuously refuses to pay a debt—if the film has a villain it's prissy, status-conscious Michael, who denies the bum's humanity they all share. Only Tony the bartender (David Proval) stays out of the mess; self-protective, responsible for no one, Tony is the obvious survivor, a mediocrity.

As these four bounce off one another—enraged, derisive, hilarious, sentimental—it becomes clear that their energy has no goal or purpose, certainly not love or career or even style (they are much less conscious of style, for instance, than the silky urban swashbucklers in recent black movies). Scorsese is celebrating emotional verve as a moral quality in itself, and this is something new in American movies and takes some getting used to. The reforming, punishing instinct dies hard, particularly in an American. In the late 1930s there were the Dead End Kids, cuddly juvenile delinquents who snarled for a couple of reels and then performed good deeds. Even Marlon Brando, as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront*, stopped being a punk in the end; redeemed by a priest and a girl he paid for wasting his potential (a prime American sin in the moral economy of the 1950s) by accepting a beating. The punks of *Mean Streets*, however, will never shape up; if they survive, they'll simply become ageing punks. As American idealism declines, and there's no longer a single type of optimistic, useful American that we all must aspire to (most of the recent models having turned out to be frauds or poltroons), film-makers are increasingly able to allow characters their own reality without imposing a moral destiny on them. Scorsese's *Mean Streets* is remarkable, I think, for its moral realism—realism without cynicism.

The mood of independent New York features of the 1950s and early 60s was modest, sombre, 'downbeat', featuring black and white cinematography in muted lyrical-documentary style, and original jazz scores, mournful and elegant, rather than studio strings. The city emerged as a grey, unhappy place; its inhabitants as weary, repressed, violent. To some this may have looked like the truth, although now it appears as artificial as any other style, a dour, often unimaginative way of appearing serious.

Scorsese goes completely in the opposite direction; the film is bursting with noise, colour, movement, and the mood is consciously over-ripe—what shall we call the style, operatic naturalism? His characters don't perceive the city as dull and grey; yes, the neighbourhood may be crummy, but up on the roofs the ever-astounding skyscrapers of New York twinkle on all sides, incredibly beautiful and powerful at night, and the local bars, admittedly lousy and stale, give off a satisfying glow. The film opens during the Feast of San

'Mean Streets': Top: Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel. Centre: Robert Carradine, David Carradine. Bottom: Harvey Keitel

Gennaro, a yearly outdoor confluence of grease, fragrance and overpowering crowds. Scorsese's point, I think, is that Little Italy has this suffocating, sweetness-of-hell atmosphere all the time, and that it's gotten to Charlie and the others and corrupted them. By immersing us in the voluptuous pleasures of the neighbourhood, Scorsese, while never suggesting that the city is a benign place, punctures the liberal view of the city as an unrelieved nightmare for poor ethnic groups. His city is hypnotic, irresistible, and for us to pretend that some people aren't drawn to the rottenness is sheer cant.

Scorsese's neighbourhood bar is a proletarian descendant of those white-on-white movie nightclubs of the 1930s and 40s where the hoods met to trade insults and listen to a girl sing. A home away from home, the bar is a pleasurable and infinitely dangerous place where wildly destructive young men get viciously drunk, brawl over impassive young women, and pass out on the floor. One man uses the bathroom to shoot heroin; another is assassinated while taking a leak. With cinematographer Kent Wakeford, Scorsese has worked out a dark reddish lighting for this place, both lurid and soft, and a floating camera style—the camera moves in behind Charlie as he greets his friends and women, tracks up and down the bar, turns a full vertical circle as a man spirals to the floor, and after a while we begin to feel drunk and dislocated ourselves, as if we were under water in a red grotto or gliding around one of the upper circles of hell.

As the friends gather for the evening, Robert De Niro as Johnny Boy makes his appearance with a girl on each arm and without his pants. I'm not sure why he has no pants—I think they're holding a pair for him at the bar or something—but De Niro makes such an outrageous show of this potentially disastrous, TV-comedy entrance—preening and posing and carrying on—that he pulls it off triumphantly. As an actor he has that kind of supreme self-assurance (or it may be desperation—at the moment it's hard to tell) that goes beyond technique and preparation; at times he reveals Johnny Boy's unconscious so effortlessly that his performance hardly seems like acting at all, but rather like some sort of super-naturalistic presence.

He's not conventionally handsome in any way: dark, stringy hair, a seemingly dumb smile and small, rather mean-looking eyes are hardly ideal physical equipment for an actor. Like Cagney, he dances through the performance, but whereas Cagney was always graceful, no matter what role he was playing, De Niro's dancing has a clumsy, swaggering rhythm to it; he reminds me of the Italian and Puerto Rican men who dance by themselves on subway platforms at three in the morning and dare you to snicker.

Yet despite the bravura, there's something touchingly selfless about him. He's always completely submerged in the character and the scene, and he's very quick and decisive, never holding the camera, for instance, through a long, dreamy pause like Warren Beatty or Robert Redford. The exuberance and physical detail of his performances are unique in American film acting at the present moment. Our leading men are either cool and withdrawn, working within a

narrow range of gesture and emotion, or they become specialists in sympathetic anxiety (Dustin Hoffman, George Segal or Richard Benjamin). De Niro doesn't have much physical beauty or an ingratiating smile to fall back on, and he won't truckle to an audience. In an earlier film of 1973, *Bang the Drum Slowly*, he played a stupid, ugly, inarticulate baseball catcher who was also dying (Christ, what a bum role!), and with his hair slicked up in a foul pompadour, tobacco spittle hanging from his lips, he was almost perversely unattractive. Clearly he doesn't care if an audience thinks he's an ugly sot; it will be interesting to see if a man this intransigent can survive in the commercial cinema.

In his first big scene with Harvey Keitel, De Niro hasn't been given much to work with in terms of script—some near-gibberish about gambling debts and a man named Joey Clams—but he improvises around the lines, and with his dancing and obscenity and terribly convincing incoherence he gives a stunning demonstration of how much an actor can do when he has his freedom. The performance is verbally disorganised to an incredible degree, but the psychological underpinning is flawlessly clear.

Scorsese counts on our familiarity with improvisation and our approval of it as a method, and I feel he uses it better than anyone in American movies so far. At one point Keitel emerges from a movie theatre and we see posters for *Point Blank* and *Husbands*. It's a very unlikely double-feature, so I assume *homage* is intended. I can't see much of *Point Blank* in *Mean Streets*, apart from the way De Niro handles a gun in one scene (like Lee Marvin, with the arm held out stiff and high and the gun muzzle pointing down), but the linkage with Cassavetes is obvious. We hear the same explosiveness and repetitions, the talk circling back to a given point, then lurching ahead in a sudden flash of anger only to come back once again. But the resemblance is only on the surface. Scorsese's improvisation conveys none of the solemnity about communication, the ritual stripping away of defence to find 'the truth', that has become Cassavetes' stock in trade. 'Directing actors means, above all, liking people, liking certain things about people,' Bertolucci has said. Despite all the evidence of Cassavetes' ready embrace of his fellow men, I find it hard to believe he likes people very much. There's something terribly aggressive in the way the camera bores in for the kill in *Husbands*, particularly in the hotel-room scenes. The super-close-ups isolate the characters from the support of their surroundings and each other, putting them interminably on the spot; in these circumstances improvisation becomes a kind of punishment.

Scorsese, on the other hand, stays back from his people, letting them move around in their own space, which he respects, allowing them to draw strength from the streets, the music, their friends; and since these working-class characters don't repress much to begin with, there's no need for laceration or emotional striptease. Thus Scorsese's improvisation becomes a fast, explosively funny way of extending the actors' expressiveness. The near-musical texture of obscenity, for instance, would be

impossible without improvisation; no one could possibly get down on paper the lunatic obsessiveness of the swearing, with its infinite variety of meanings conveyed through minute variations in rhythm and inflection. The mood of the dialogue is almost ecstatically high-pitched; Scorsese uses improvisation to make his people sound as free as possible, not stricken, like Cassavetes' sufferers. But when he has an actor who can't pull it off he's in trouble. Amy Robinson has an impossible role to begin with (the adoring epileptic girl friend), but her anxiety and self-consciousness in the semi-improvised scenes makes the character seem unnecessarily pathetic—not even on the same existential plane as these ecstatic male talkers.

Scorsese is already a master of film texture and expressive atmosphere and directing actors, but as I said earlier, his narrative sense is weak. Once he sets up his relationships and moods, he's incapable of developing them. The endless quarrels and fist-fights don't lead anywhere; the Charlie-Johnny Boy dependency doesn't accumulate new meanings as the movie goes on, it's simply stated over and over with increasing vehemence. For a while, in the middle, you don't think the story is ever going to move forward again, and a terrible depression sets in; afterwards it seems as though the middle sequences could be shifted around without damage and some of them dropped altogether. The tension never sags, but since the actors rather than the narrative supply all the urgency, we get tired of being worked up emotionally only to learn what we already know. It's as if we were starting at the beginning each time, as if Scorsese didn't trust the audience to absorb or learn anything; he wants to recapitulate the movie in every scene, like a mad composer who can't relinquish a good melody.

We come out grateful for this experience but also feeling a bit mauled. Don't Italian-Americans ever communicate without slapping and shoving and brawling? Aren't there any quieter forms of intensity? Scorsese knows how to reach an audience in the gut, but some of his demands are obtuse. The scene in which Teresa has an epileptic fit in the middle of a furious argument between Charlie and Johnny Boy is supposed to be powerful and tragic, but it comes out as ludicrously overwrought and flatly unbelievable, particularly since the men run off and leave her to continue their argument. It's an abuse of the audience because there's no possible way we can relate to the scene emotionally, and Scorsese must know that at some level, because he doesn't stay with that girl writhing on the floor either.

These terrible mistakes (and there are others) are so forgivable because they emerge out of the same violent sincerity that makes the film exciting: Scorsese's impulse to express all he feels about life in every scene (a cannier, more prudent director wouldn't have started his film with that great De Niro monologue), and thus to wrench the audience upwards into a new state of consciousness with one prolonged and devastating gesture, infinitely hurting and infinitely tender. *Mean Streets* comes close enough to this feverish ideal to warrant our love and much of our respect.

Film REVIEWS

El Topo

Many a lone horseman has drifted in across the high hot plains since the days of Shane, purged a restless group of townsfolk of their vices and guilts, and dwindled once again into the desert leaving a pile of corpses to be disposed of by the survivors. The staying-power of the Western has come to depend upon this hollow-eyed metaphor, an unquestionable moralist whose force of argument relies not on rhetoric but on the entirely dubious moral superiority of the well-aimed bullet. He wins too many battles for his audience to risk not being on his side, and although he has become a little more vulnerable in the last decade his potency as a freedom fighter is undiminished. Billy the Kid lives on. And so when we see Alexandro Jodorowsky riding purposefully over the dunes in black leather, we need have no doubts about the story that *El Topo* (ABKCO) will tell us: cowardice, corruption, capitalism and complacency, spinning like windmill sails, are in for another onslaught.

The gaunt figure of Jodorowsky, however, carries not a lance but an umbrella, while the diminutive Sancho Panza behind him is a nude seven-year-old clutching a teddy-bear and a framed picture of his mother. It is time, the boy is told, for childish things like toys and mothers to be put away—somewhat ineptly in the sand, as it turns out—and for him to become a man. Father plays a flute for the burial, and they ride off to meet the world, umbrella still hovering bat-like above them. The peculiar fascination of *El Topo* is defined by the dislocations of this opening scene: the brilliant photography and the simplicity of the action are counterbalanced by the sense of ritual, in which every move, every object, carries a history of meanings. At the same time the performance has an undercurrent of absurdity, as if each meaning, once analysed, would prove to contain its own contradiction. No child can wholly discard one parent for the other, no rational education neglects the value of play-things, no rider travels naked if there's a long journey ahead. The film tells us that the mole is a creature which digs through the earth in search of the sun, only to be blinded when it comes to the surface, but this too is a claim based on confusion rather than accuracy. It sounds tragic, its relevance to a philosophy of life is unquestionable, but it just doesn't happen to be true.

No matter, *El Topo* sweeps grandly on its way. The child's first lesson is a vision of hell, a scrubby Mexican street after a massacre, bodies everywhere, disembowelled animals, vast pools of blood from which strange colours of sunlight are reflected, men hanging like sides of meat, and an electronic cacophony of scavengers on the soundtrack (although there's hardly a fly to be seen). The child learns either pity or pragmatism, take your choice, when handed a pistol to finish off a dying man, and is then carted off to learn the lesson of vengeance as his father tracks down the bandits responsible and kills them off. A merry, clownish bunch, these ruffians, given to raping shoes, lizards, monks and their leader's girl, given the chance. *El Topo* removes their leader's toupee, clothes, and

manhood, rescues the girl, and abandons his son to the clergy with the inestimable advice that nobody can be trusted. Watching his father depart in the clutches of a mere female, the boy can be seen to have completed his education.

'Who are you to judge me?' the bandit leader asks, confronting his Nemesis. It's a useful question, but characteristically the reply only complicates matters. *El Topo*, it seems, considers himself to be God, although in retrospect he may mean he's a god, or he may mean he's the Son of God, or he may have made a mistake. To the envy of his girl, he finds water in the desert by shooting the top off a rock, and he finds food by digging up turtles' eggs; he bestows an orgasm upon her, whereupon she too becomes capable of these homely miracles. As she points out, however, he's not much of a God as there are at least four other men in the desert faster with a gun than he is. These four Masters, a splendid quartet of vaguely Taoist eccentrics, have to be defeated by a succession of tricks so dirty that *El Topo*, supreme, rushes about the sands in an agony of remorse and settles for being the Son of God when stigmata are shot into his hands and feet by a Lesbian who then rides off with his girl. The encounters are amazing, replete with lions, lambs and white rabbits; since the Crucifixion has been retold as everything from a musical to a bicycle race, there seems no reason why it shouldn't be shown as a Western, but Jodorowsky obviously likes to work with every kind of myth simultaneously, and his duels with the four Masters are a bewildering round-up of creeds and conceits. Put simply, the first half of *El Topo* shows a man testing the limits of his physical and moral strength—and finding he has failed himself.

The second half, predictably enough, begins

with the resurrection. Now a startling albino reminiscent of Fritz Lang's blow-wave Siegfried, *El Topo* regains consciousness underground, where he has been tended for years by a community of cripples. Brought to full awareness by chewing on a ceremonial stag-beetle, he vows to release the pathetic creatures around him by tunnelling an exit for them through solid rock; but when they at last break into the light the results, of course, are fatal for them. *El Topo* has a final orgy of killing in the local town and immolates himself in the Buddhist gesture of shared guilt, protest and despair. His son has meanwhile reappeared, now fully grown and dressed in the standard sepulchral family colour, and rides off with *El Topo*'s wife and child to start the whole thing over again. It's not so much a full circle as a spiral, in keeping with Jodorowsky's affection for the theories of Gurdjieff, and its message seems to be that society may destroy itself but the spirit has just a chance of surviving.

One would be tempted to ignore the film's echoing gallery of ciphers and symbols, were they not so much a part of the fun. Jodorowsky, meaningful as Buñuel, meaningless as Fellini, carries his extremes further than either of them into the stormy surrealist regions of the ludicrous; but in an instant he's back again, playing Beckett, Jarry, Peckinpah. His personification of the auteur theory would be intolerable were he not so energetic, so inventive a director, as willing to parody (the low-angle shot of *El Topo* bursting through a door) as to imitate (a bandit sucking the toe of an elegant high-heeled shoe). His own performance is hypnotic, going all the way from shaggy marksman to shaven guru, and he is supported by a remarkable cast of unselfish agonisers.

PHILIP STRICK

The Long Goodbye

After Charles Gregory's *Knight Without Meaning?* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1973) there is not too much left to be said about Robert Altman's iconoclastic approach to Raymond Chandler, the private eye movies of the post-war years and the *film noir* cycle. The following observations therefore are largely footnotes to his lengthy analysis.

The Long Goodbye was Chandler's first novel for four years, took more time and pain than any previous book, and was his last work of any

'El Topo': Jodorowsky (in black) with live Master and dead rabbits



consequence. On its American publication in 1954, it was reviewed in *Time*—prophetically one might think—on the same page as Ian Fleming's first Bond book, *Casino Royale*, and already then Marlowe seemed like a figure from the past. Two years earlier, in charting the rise of the despicable Mike Hammer, Charles Rollo mentioned with more hope than conviction that 'Chandler's shamus represents the wish-fulfilment of an ideal not yet quite dead.' By 1955 the time was ripe for Robert Altman to subvert the new ethos in *Kiss Me Deadly* by marrying, as he said, 'the commercial values of the Spillane properties with a morality that states that justice is not to be found in a self-anointed, one-man vigilante.' In the post-liberal, post-McCarthyist 1970s, Altman's *Long Goodbye* (United Artists) brings us full circle.

The Long Goodbye is perhaps Chandler's sourest novel, also his most sentimental, and Marlowe is even conscious of being a parody of himself, a private eye in a detective story. The old hatreds are there for everything and everybody, and added to them is a loathing of television. However, Chandler endorses the personal heroic cynicism of Marlowe against the effective, because powerful and institutionalised, cynicism of the multi-millionaire fixer Harlan Potter, a character dropped from the movie—though oddly enough he corresponds to the impersonal forces challenged by Altman's earlier anti-heroes: the military machine in *M*A*S*H* and the anonymous corporation taking over the aptly named frontier community of Presbyterian Church in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*.

But if Altman is as confused and romantic as Chandler, he has removed the crutches by which Marlowe took his last walk down the mean streets in the novel. One of these comes about through updating the movie, which eliminates the World War II experiences of the characters and thus the bonds ('the secret understanding', to use Forster's phrase) that those years gave rise to. Secondly, he has turned Marlowe's friend Terry Lennox into a coldly calculating murderer, instead of a deeply troubled suspected killer, and thus destroyed the basis of faith and comradeship that provided the moral basis and narrative spine of the book.

Yet Altman's Southern California is not as far removed from Chandler's as has been claimed—it's merely that the corruption and decadence are now much more on the surface. Pornography is sold openly on Hollywood Boulevard today and not peddled, as in *The Big Sleep*, days, in the backrooms of fake rare-book shops. There is too a thick layer of nostalgia in the film: Marlowe and Terry Lennox play 'Trivia' quiz games; Marlowe uses fingerprint ink to make himself up as Al Jolson during a police interrogation, and he calls a dog that blocks his car 'Asta' (after the *Thin Man's* pet); the gatekeeper of an odiously luxurious private housing estate imitates stars of the past including Cary Grant (Chandler's idea of the ideal Marlowe) and Barbara Stanwyck (in a scene from *Double Indemnity* which Chandler scripted), and so on.

In the bizarre world of Hollywood and Los Angeles, nothing is quite as it seems, and Altman has deliberately cast the picture to set up weird resonances. The *femme fatale* Eileen Wade is played by Nina van Pallandt, a singer and—through her involvement in an international scandal—celebrity. As her hard-drinking, Hemingwayesque husband we have Sterling Hayden, 'a friendly witness' before HUAC who loathes his Hollywood past and regards himself now as a writer. The bland *Laugh-In* comic Henry Gibson has been chosen to play the sinister epinec therapist; Jim Bouton, a baseball star turned writer, makes his movie debut as Lennox; Mark Rydell, a young director, representative of the new permissive Hollywood, returns to acting as the trendy, psychotic mobster and Nixon-neighbour Marty



'The Sting': Robert Redford, Dimitra Arliss

Augustine. Almost the only full-time professional in the film is Elliott Gould, who is virtually the antithesis of the WASPish Marlowes of the past, and he drifts somnambulistically through the proceedings, very much not in control as narrator or shaper, chain-smoking not like Bogart but rather as if he were a cigarette-puffing machine in a cancer research clinic.

The same goes for Altman's other collaborators. Leigh Brackett was co-scriptwriter of *The Big Sleep*, and takes a single credit here. Johnny Mercer, who provides the lyrics for the title song that turns up throughout the picture in whimsical fashion (on car radios, sung by various characters, picked out by an inept bar pianist, performed as a funeral dirge by a Mexican town band), was also the writer of 'Hooray for Hollywood', a big production number from Busby Berkeley's *Hollywood Hotel* (1937). The latter celebratory song is played in all its crackly glory on the soundtrack as Gould ambles happily down a Mexican country road after killing Terry Lennox. This final scene, like much else in the picture, has several levels of parody—most obviously we have Marlowe liberated from the mean city streets, but also there is a strong reference to the conclusion of *The Third Man*, treated here as comedy with the roles of hero and heroine reversed after the second (and real) death of another treacherous friend.

Once again with *The Long Goodbye*, Altman has found the right form to render a state of chaos: the overlapping, often half-heard dialogue, the restless camera, the constant looping around to avoid climaxes and undercut dramatic confrontations, the deliberate confusion between what we think we are supposed to be concentrating on and the growing dot of physical or emotional focus that comes to seize our attention. This is best rendered perhaps when the Wades discuss their marriage behind a glass wall that reflects the excluded Marlowe as he walks along the beach waiting to be recalled to their presence; and the later, parallel scene in which Marlowe and Eileen Wade talk as her husband wanders down to the sea to commit suicide.

Ultimately *The Long Goodbye* is a heartless picture, as elegant, chilly and highly polished as a Brancusi sculpture. It differs not only from Chandler's novel but also from *M*A*S*H* and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* in being largely devoid of human feeling. This is the result, one suspects, of Altman's failure to find in Marlowe

any countervailing virtue to set against the society he lives in—and of denying him the casual professionalism that the director so clearly admired in his anarchically inclined Korean War surgeons and his sadly vulnerable frontier brothel-owners.

PHILIP FRENCH

The Sting and The Mackintosh Man

Scott Joplin's lovely piano rags, with their Mozartian blend of tenderness and gaiety, were probably bound to be annexed sooner or later as background music. The pity is that it had to happen in a film like *The Sting* (CIC), where they are merely fellow-travellers on the nostalgia bandwagon, and treated rather cavalierly at that. Like its predecessor *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Sting* is so determined to leave no stone unturned in its pursuit of favour that it overdoes things. The setting, recreated down to the last snake-hip and snap-brim, is Chicago in 1936: a place and a period rich enough in indigenous memories not to require the borrowed bonus of turn-of-the-century ragtime as well as irises, wipes and inter-titles redolent of the Twenties.

Still, with Paul Newman and Robert Redford in fine form, and Robert Surtees surpassing himself with images so richly detailed and so muted in tone that one almost forgets the film is in colour—and who can possibly imagine Al Capone's Chicago other than in terms of black and white?—*The Sting* is a charmer, no doubt about that. From the opening shot, with the camera roving past a huddled bread-line and along a mean, windblown street littered with rattletrap cars and overflowing ashcans, down to the finale with FBI Special Agent Polk bursting in to do a spot of racket-busting, a fantasy world lives again, ostentatiously shutting any breath of reality out of its studio atmosphere.

The film begins with a beautifully staged confidence trick on the audience. A sneak thief running down an alley, a dignified old Negro yelling help, and pinched, ragged-suited Redford coming to the rescue: all, one eventually realises, being a con within the con, designed to trap a racketeer's messenger bearing the day's takings. Cheerfully blowing his share in one throw at roulette, then getting himself out of trouble by passing counterfeit notes, Redford prepares to move on; but the paranoid racketeer (Robert

Shaw) cannot forgive, the old Negro is vengefully killed, and with a crooked cop on his tail, Redford heads hopefully for safety and betterment with an introduction to one Gondorff (Paul Newman), a big-time con man. Characteristically of this looking-glass world, Gondorff turns out to be on his uppers and holed up in a bordello run by his girl Billie (Eileen Brennan); equally characteristically, the main feature of this bordello is the brightly painted carousel below stairs, presumably used as a front, but only once seen in operation, for playtime in the cat-house, whirling round with its innocently gaudy cargo of whores.

Thereafter the film becomes a kind of wish-fulfilment retort to *The Godfather*, proving that nobody need get hurt when all-American cunning is pitted against syndicate tuggery. You don't ask questions, you just accept that a fairy godmother has endowed Newman and Redford with the charisma to pull off the gigantic confidence trick curling into as many twists as a python, with which they 'take' the racketeer—and, incidentally, the audience—by way of a fake betting shop involving a cast of hundreds. It all starts, for instance, with a floating poker game—almost literally, since it takes place on a train en route from New York to Chicago—in which Newman, dealt a losing four threes by the crooked dealer, manages to show a winning four jacks when called. How? Well... in the context it hardly matters.

That the film is never in real danger of floating away on its airy graces, is due not only to the pleasures Surtees offers for the eye, or to the wit and skill of the stars (note Redford's sad little sigh of resignation when he has to accept a punch on the jaw as an unexpected embroidery on the plan), but to George Roy Hill's affectionate respect for his cast, all of whom come alive even in the tiniest roles. The ageing, proudly moustachioed con man (played by Tom Spratley), for instance, who applies for a role in the plan, explaining that his speciality is the English gentleman and that he has all his own props: only a couple of tiny scenes and as many lines, yet he sticks in the mind. Or the marvelously dreary waitress (Dimitra Arliss), bitten by a thousand wisecracks and inadequate tips under the greasy hash-plate, whom Redford tries to date in a moment of despair: oddly beautiful with her angular poker-face suggesting a long-lost Andrews Sister, she trails behind her a whole vista of sad, wisecracking and ultimately abandoned molls from Hollywood's past.

Confidence tricks in the cinema, however, have an unfortunate habit of rebounding, so that a film employing one (think of *Les Diaboliques*) tends to be a once-only experience. All the same, considering how neatly *The Sting* deploys its sleight-of-hand, it seems a pity that *The Mackintosh Man* (Columbia-Warner) jettisons the effectively tricky structure of Desmond Bagley's novel, where the whole first third of the book is a straightforward, meticulously detailed description of a diamond robbery, the anonymous tip-off which lands the thief Rearden in jail, and the eventual intervention by the mysterious escape organisation, The Scarperers, which gets him out again. Only when he is free, and The Scarperers begin to doubt his *bona fides*, is it revealed—in a long flashback which cunningly adds to the ramifications of the plot—that Rearden is an agent and knew all along that he was *supposed* to go to jail. The trick played on the reader is all the more effective in that the story is a first-person narrative by Rearden which manages, quite credibly, not to give the game away.

Arguably the device might not have worked in a film; unarguably, the beginning of *The Mackintosh Man* doesn't really work. A shot of the Houses of Parliament; cut inside to hear backbencher James Mason making a pious speech about security, patriotism, and the doings of subversives; clearly he can be up to no good. So when Rearden (Paul Newman, so he must be the hero?) arrives to see the

enigmatic Mackintosh (Harry Andrews), the already alerted audience is further guided by an enquiry about how Rearden's phony Australian accent is coming on, and by a shot of him studying a sheet giving details of his prison record. Yes, he is only pretending to be a thief; and yes, indeed he is the hero.

There is something endearingly silly, rather Boy's Own Paperish about this opening, which the film never quite manages to shake off: Richard Hannay is back to do battle with a villain who is first cousin to the eminently respectable man with the missing finger from *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. The echo is intensified by such details as Rearden's habit of wisecracking in the face of danger, his escape across bleak Celtic moors and his difficulties with local dialect, and the ill-advised departure from the novel at the end which has him agree to a gentlemanly non-aggression pact with the villains (even though it has been established that the Russian spy, at least, must be stopped at all costs from escaping). The trouble is that Hannay ethics don't really tally with ultra-modern phenomena like The Scarperers; and even if they did (tentacular organisations, after all, go back to *Mabuse*, Feuillade and beyond), Huston is too much of a realist to let fantasy reign. With one stroke of his camera, he can define a setting so accurately—the prison, for instance—that it is absolutely situated in time and place. The setting for *The Mackintosh Man* is undoubtedly Britain today; but the characters are wearing some weird moral fancy dress.

But when Huston is having fun, even with rickety vehicles like *The List of Adrian Messenger* or *The Kremlin Letter*, it is hard to resist joining him. He knows, to resort to a well-worn phrase, where to put the camera. Time and again one finds oneself hugging a secret pleasure as the camera indolently half-reveals some treasure: Mackintosh's office, with its décor proclaiming a halfway house between huntin'-shootin'-fishin' and austere bachelor; the casual grace of the prison break, done with absolute clarity and no fuss whatsoever; Dominique Sanda's raised champagne glass responding to James Mason's toast with a sleek warning to Paul Newman at a window high above. *The Mackintosh Man* is much more good than bad. But is it, from the man who so recently made *Fat City*, enough?

TOM MILNE

King, Queen, Knave

Poorly received at the 1972 Cannes Festival, Skolimowski's erratic, piecemeal, yet distinctly Nabokovian adaptation of *King, Queen, Knave* seems subsequently to have been abandoned to its own hermetic limbo; one of those freakishly unreal landscapes that Skolimowski has scattered across the continent, from the Warsaw of his early films to the Brussels of *Le Départ* and the Munich-for-London of *Deep End*. Nabokov's 1928 novel has been updated, shifted from Berlin to Munich, its triplet of playing-card principals given new histories: Charles Dreyer (David Niven), creator of a large men's clothing emporium ('the product of a daring dream'), is an ex-English Army captain who settled in Germany after the war with his Italian refugee wife Martha (Gina Lollobrigida), and who invites his nephew Frank (John Moulder-Brown), a myopic mooncalf of an English schoolboy, to Munich after his father's death.

Skolimowski thus adds his own twist to Nabokov's explanation of how, in dealing with German characters in a German setting, his ignorance of all things German 'answered my dream of pure invention'; and the film slyly demonstrates that the Nabokovian mechanics are still in good working order, though in the hands of a new engineer. A large part of the novelist's delight in his setting of 'pure invention' was that it proved a frighteningly fluid medium for his characters. Travelling by train in Chapter One, the youthful hero changes compartments and bemusedly notes that 'The transition from the third-class compartment, where a noseless monster reigned in silence, into this sunny plush room' was like 'the passage from a hideous hell through the purgatory of the corridors and intervestibular clatter into a little abode of bliss.' Waking in his hotel in Chapter Two, and promptly breaking his spectacles, he experiences the oozy colours and contours of the world as though he 'had not awakened in his hotel bed that morning but had merely passed into the next stratum of sleep.'

Skolimowski's *King, Queen, Knave* (LMG) propels Frank into the cool world of his elders with a similar queasy shock. A magnificent opening shot takes wing to follow Charles and Martha, dressed in mourning, as they drive to meet Frank, while the soundtrack gives out an electronic rendition of the Funeral March and a mysterious cacophony of barking dogs.

'The Mackintosh Man': Paul Newman hesitates, Dominique Sanda shoots



Martha terminates a row over their nephew by glancing abruptly into her mirror, which is the signal for Frank's sudden appearance, blissfully sledding his suitcase along an airport corridor and then disastrously trying to leap aboard. The looking-glass connection is bungled: the plane takes off, a receptionist patiently explains to Frank that he is still in London, and his relatives irritably wait in Munich, elegantly posed in black against a sea of orange chairs. Mirrors continue intermittently to flicker messages (in the celibate vistas of the Dreyers' bedroom; in the drab rented room that serves Frank and his aunt as a rhythmically groaning, squeaking love-nest). Nabokov observed that the looking-glasses in his Chinese box construction were required to work overtime; Skolimowski caps the theme with a baroque joke of his own when Martha and her reluctant accomplice are about to send Dreyer to a watery grave, and she glimpses in her mirror the hooded figure of the Reaper, casually trying out his scythe.

Centred vaguely on the efforts of the mad inventor commissioned by Dreyer to develop mechanical mannequins out of his bizarre discovery of a perfect rubber substitute for skin, Nabokov's ironic manipulations of his characters emphasised how, in their respective dreams and schemes, they reduced each other to dummies, playing-cards, inanimate articles, and worse. More eccentric in his stylisation, Skolimowski achieves the same effect with fizzing changes of mood, suggesting instead of teasing layers of dream fitful explosions of obsession: the hallucinating adolescent frustration of Frank's first visit to Martha; their later assignation, all speeded-up action and inhuman squawkings, machine-gun effects and the occasional line of dialogue straight from the original ('I bet you a new sweater you can't do it again') on the soundtrack; Frank rising in lyrical satisfaction from the chaos of the room, his cheeks covered with a second down of pillow feathers, and finding a farewell note from Martha, read over in lilting sing-song. While the lovers plot their future happiness, interpolated scenes of Dreyer cavorting in the snow with two red and yellow ski-suited playmates reduce him to as much of a bothersome abstraction as later, more grotesquely tinted, murderous fantasies.

Skolimowski undoubtedly loses out to Nabokov at the periphery, where such incidental characters in the novel as the old landlord Enrich occasionally shuffle centre stage and seem about to take over the whole fiction ('For he knew perfectly well—had known for the last eight years at least—that the whole world was but a trick of his'). The sideline figures of the film—like the old man who stumbles by with a cross, temporarily barring Frank's way to another battering tryst—become just so many impedimenta, part of the bizarrely jangled soundtrack accompaniment to the obliviously comic *danse macabre* of the principal clowns.

RICHARD COMBS



'King, Queen, Knave': Lollobrigida, Niven

Tanner's film depicted the plight of a young girl who refused to have her wayward individuality flattened to fit the demands of a pedantic and materialist society. Goretta's story is in many ways the same conflict writ small: a gentle, Renoir-like study of the comic interlockings of people at a party which gradually hardens into an allegorical clash between individual spontaneity and social protocol. As sketched in for us during the credit sequence, the office where the meek, elderly Rémy Placet works seems a model of quiet efficiency: the typewriters tap, the secretaries glide, the boss frowns out benignly from his glass-partitioned office. But, as the story unfolds, its occupants are seen to form a hierarchy so fragile that it takes only the smallest dislodgement at the base—Rémy's retirement, on the death of his mother, to a wealthy mansion in the country—to bring the whole pyramid tumbling to the ground.

The paradox of Goretta's film is that while the action spirals slowly towards chaos, the style itself remains impeccably cool and elegant. The story's comic stages are clearly and wittily outlined—the guests arriving awed and complimentary at Rémy's al fresco house-warming party, the early solemnity disrupted by jokes

'Electra Glide in Blue': Robert Blake, Elisha Cook Jr.



from the office 'wag' Maurice, the affronted gasps that greet the same character coolly relieving his host of a hundred francs in a party game forfeit, and the final rupturing of decorum when the giggling, red-headed secretary Aline starts to strip off on the front lawn. Through all these stages, however, Goretta not only keeps his camera at a serene middle distance (Jean Zeller's lucent photography framing the characters against expanses of summer lawn or sky), but holds his cast in such exact dramatic balance that the more attractive characters (Jean-Luc Bideau's ebullient Maurice) never monopolise our attention at the expense of the less sympathetic ones (Pierre Collet's worldly, hypocritical boss, Jean Champion's tetchy assistant manager).

The film's sly concluding message clearly is that a party has its unwritten protocol, just as an office job does. And although two of the film's characters remain steadfastly aloof from the party's high spirits—François Simon's icily enigmatic barman, Jacques Rispal as the mild little clerk who, dumbfounded by his host's estate, spends the afternoon pacing out the terrace, checking the central heating system and chatting up the head gardener—among the rest the comic suspense lies in seeing who will be the next to stiffen into intolerance as the social anarchy escalates. No one—not even Maurice, last seen hurling recriminations at the thief who has stolen and torn his cherished blue blazer—gets away with his dignity unruffled. The beauty of Goretta's film is that it charts a comedy of social breakdown with metronomic precision and control. For all the clear temptation to slapstick that the story holds out, the anarchy of the content never looks like spreading to the film's measured and immaculate style.

NIGEL ANDREWS

Electra Glide in Blue

Signalled by glowing, apocalyptic images from Conrad Hall, *Electra Glide in Blue* takes possession of Monument Valley, casting out the ghosts of Ford's historically idealised past and moving in the meagre props—a few motorcycles, a VW bus, some weaponry—of an a-historical present. Ford's mythology gained substance through the veneration and nostalgia that surrounded its relics; his ideals of order and community had the reality of an unquestioned belief that men could work together and build. Some chill winds, by comparison, are blowing through the canyons in *Electra Glide*. Veneration is reserved, in one lushly ironic sequence at the beginning, for lonely superman symbols of power as John Wintergreen, pint-sized Arizona motorcycle cop, zips, buckles and buttons himself into his uniform; and when he puts a tentative foot on the ladder of success, partnership turns out to be as bankrupt an illusion as 'Manifest Destiny'.

It is not merely the epic treatment of the familiar craggy buttes and rolling plains which suggests that James William Guercio, making his first feature, is out to replace the old mythology with a new one. For all its sympathetic portrait of a gentle, well-intentioned cop caught in a crossfire of misunderstanding, *Electra Glide in Blue* (United Artists) rattles with grand oppositions not really connected to local problems of law and order. The confrontation of Wintergreen (Robert Blake) and his patrol buddy Zipper Davis (Billy 'Green' Bush) with the motorcycle freaks who at one point come roaring through the Valley becomes a chase as exhilarating (and as finely shot and edited, forgetting the snatches of slow motion) as a cavalry versus Indians skirmish in Ford. Except that time has contrived to scramble the values, so that it is no longer clear which side represents what in the struggle of civilisation against savagery. And time has also closed down the battlefield: the land looks deceptively, breathtakingly, as if it must go on forever, but

The Invitation

It is ironic that, years after the British Free Cinema movement of the 1950s ceased supplying its native industry with fresh directorial talent, two of that movement's late-flowering members should be rediscovered alive and well and spearheading a new national cinema in Switzerland. On first inspection, Claude Goretta's *The Invitation* (Connoisseur) seems to owe less than Alain Tanner's *The Salamander* to the sociological concerns that characterised much of Free Cinema film-making. But while both films work effectively on one level as quirky, astringent comedies of character, their deeper comic stings derive from a tension between social propriety and individual freedom that seems aimed at a more specific satire on Swiss character.

the hardest struggles are now waged in men's minds and become increasingly bizarre, frightening and phantasmagoric.

Electra Glide slides in and out of black comedy with the same ease that its characters turn into highly coloured cut-outs of their own fiercest ambitions: Harve Poole, the super-detective who takes Wintergreen in tow, elevates paranoia to a religion and turns police work into a pantheistic mystery ('The night is talking to us, Wintergreen. Sit down and listen'); Zipper Davis idles away his duty hours in the shade, adding details to his vision of the perfect motorcycle. The theme of 'You've got to have a dream', announced with due solemnity by Wintergreen as he anticipates trading his black leather for the cool suit and stetson of a detective, is given the precise absurdity of a comic-strip. It is Zipper who reads aloud from the exploits of Buck Rogers and Co. (space rangers guarding the cosmos . . .). The past has been disconnected, but the beautiful technology of the *Electra Glide* machines is a link with a possible future.

Pointedly, Wintergreen is given a history. After the film's opening montage of the murder mystery that will briefly give life to his dream, the camera picks over the furniture in the hero's bedroom, fading out on a painting of a group of Indians. The irony seems to be less that Wintergreen is now the custodian with the badge than that the heritage clearly spells his doom. Similarly a man with a past, and similarly lost, is old Willie (Elisha Cook), the deranged prospector whom the two patrolmen find wandering in the desert, and who babbles the news that his partner Frank is dead, lying in their shack with his chest blown away by a shotgun. Later, during questioning, Willie declares his own, the pioneer heritage, through demented references to uncontaminated land in the 'Superstition Mountains' ('I know places there nobody's ever seen'), and then tells how he had lately been rejected by Frank, who had turned to the company of the youngsters to whom he could sell drugs. Willie's loneliness is the key to the crime, as Wintergreen realises in a piece of intuitive reasoning ('I just listen to myself and I know who killed him') that trumps the megalomaniac raving ('The whole world's talking to me!') of Harve Poole.

Willie's madness closes out the past, and the collapse of the old prospectors' friendship becomes the first in a series of similar deaths as one by one the gods that have failed are dispensed with. Poole (Mitchell Ryan) is a comically wrongheaded messiah and revealed, not unexpectedly, to be impotent to boot. The revelation (made by the girl friend, Jolene, whom he and Poole discover they are sharing) ends Wintergreen's brief spell as the detective's protégé. He returns to his beat on the highways, where his comic-pathetic, Mutt and Jeff friendship with Zipper abruptly crumbles when the latter runs amok in a fit of despair and Wintergreen is forced to kill him. The film majestically treats each of these little deaths as a climax in itself, and the occasional 'Zarathustrian' note which the music strikes hereabouts suggests that Guercio, having sealed the fate of past and present, is toying with his own vision of rebirth. It is a suggestion picked up in Wintergreen's musings about himself and his father, who also had the gift of listening to his 'inner voice' and who committed suicide; and in Guercio's reportedly finding optimism in the ending (Wintergreen blasted from his bike and left sitting, like a shattered rag doll, in the middle of the road).

The film seems to have been directly influenced by the epochal style of Kubrick, and in its theme perhaps suggests a broader comparison with the message of Alan Harrington's book *The Immortalist*: 'Since the beginning of recorded time man has engaged in a disguised drive to make himself immortal and divine, and . . . this overriding motive which accounts

for much of his significant action, is now driving him toward his evolutionary crisis. The time has come for men to turn into gods or perish.' In fact, a multitude of echoes (excluding the superficial quote from *Easy Rider*) contribute to an impression that Guercio is better at orchestrating his effects than stage-managing his story (too many set-piece confessional scenes, Jolene's in particular). Reservations about what is undoubtedly, for a first film, a triumphant assertion of style centre on the fear that, once the reverberations have ceased, *Electra Glide in Blue* may look too much like an echo chamber.

RICHARD COMBS

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid (CIC) was a worthy choice to accompany *Charley Varrick* on general release, but deserved a better fate than to have done so without benefit of a press show. Deeply indebted to *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch*, and equally in thrall to the Marxist notion of 'social banditry' (examined by Eric Hobsbawm in his book *Bandits*), it seizes on the final debacle in September 1876 at Northfield, Minnesota, that ended the ten-year rampage of the James-Younger gang along America's middle border.

Cole Younger (Cliff Robertson) is the gang's ideologue and shrewd planner, a smiling fantasist, never out of his semi-bullet-proof leather cuirass that recalls Ned Kelly's helmet; Jesse James (Robert Duvall) is a hysterical, psychopathic religious maniac. In an opening conversation with his stupid brother Frank, Jesse comes across a discarded Northfield bank prospectus annotated by Cole—we suddenly realise that this has been put on a hook for lavatory paper and that the brothers are sitting beside each other on a two-seat privy. Shortly thereafter Jesse has a religious vision that they must attack the distant Northfield as a wild act of revenge—against the new settlers (the gang are xenophobes to a man), the railroad companies, and the Pinkerton agency that is relentlessly pursuing them. Forced to go along with this plan, Cole forges ahead of the James group, finds the bank empty and conspires with the manager to con the suspicious local inhabitants into depositing their money.

Through a mixture of ironic invention and historical fact (the latter oddly enough being the source of the most romantic elements), the writer-director Philip Kaufman, whose first film this is since he co-directed the underground feature *Goldstein* in 1963, presents the gang as simultaneously historical pawns, participants on both sides in the process of social change, and agents of their own destruction. In this he anticipates a similar handling of the last days of another outlaw band in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, made some two years later.

Photographed by Bruce Surtees after the fashion of Frederic Remington's dustiest paintings, the film always looks good. And while it jerks along rather uneasily and often incoherently from one set-piece to another, the best individual scenes have a remarkable depth; the burgeoning post-frontier community of Northfield has a convincingly raw yet truly inhabited feel rare in Westerns (much superior I'd say to comparable Peckinpah settings), and the bungled hold-up is staged with real bravura. Among several memorable sequences, one recalls the lynching of four innocent brothel patrons by a desperate, frustrated posse (the effect is rather like *The Ox-Bow Incident* condensed to two minutes), and a scene in which Cole Younger comes upon a crowd of sportsmen outside town playing a very timid game of baseball. 'It's the new national pastime,' fellow spectators tell him enthusiastically. 'Our national pastime is shooting—and always will be,' he asserts

confidently, and blows the ball to pieces with a shotgun to drive home his point.

Thematically and stylistically, Kaufman's picture bears a certain resemblance to a more recent directorial debut, Martin Scorsese's *Boxcar Bertha*. Both are works of considerable interest and uncertainty, as well as being clearly derivative (in Scorsese's case from Penn and Corman). Yet they have enough individuality and feeling for the medium to make one look forward with quite high expectations to their directors' next films.

PHILIP FRENCH

LONDON FESTIVAL FILMS

At the time of going to press, the 17th London Festival is only a few days into its run. Some films which we might have wanted to write about, such as the Japanese *Time Within Memory*, which gets such an intriguingly Proustian write-up in the programme book, are not yet in this country. The main British entry, *My Ain Folk*, second part of Bill Douglas' autobiographical trilogy, has yet to emerge from the labs.

In the circumstances, any attempt at comprehensive coverage of an extremely eclectic, not to say heterogeneous festival would be arbitrary and possibly misleading. Many of the films on display have of course already been noted by our travelling correspondents: among them Ray's *Distant Thunder*, Delvaux's *Belle*, Alain Tanner's *Retour d'Afrique*, Herzog's *Aguirre*, the *Wrath of God*, Marco Leto's *La Villeggiatura*, Denys Arcand's *Réjeanne Padovani*. But the 17th has followed the trend of recent festivals in going for quantity. Given the number of movies of 1973 which have already reached London (such as Truffaut's *Day for Night*, the perfect opening picture, but the one that got away) or which have escaped the organisers' net (*La Maman et la Putain* being prominent among the missing) the 45 features in the line-up inevitably add up to a very assorted field, rampant with dark horses. We review here not a representative so much as a first selection; and hope to catch up with some others later.

The Wanderers

Until recently, in its upper reaches at least, the Japanese cinema seemed inviolable on its own ground: even when there were unmistakable influences, as with Kurosawa and Ford, the borrowings were simply enlisted into the service of the traditional Japanese aesthetic. That things have been changing is indicated on the one hand by the fact that the one truly dominant figure of the past few years has been Oshima, a film-maker who owes at least as much to the West as to Japanese tradition; and on the other, by the sad spectacle of a major director like Ichikawa, in *To Love Again*, slavishly churning out a *Love Story* tied up with pretty Lelouch ribbons.

With *The Wanderers*, happily, the evident need for an internationally saleable gimmick had led Ichikawa to a much more congenial model in the Hong Kong kung-fu phenomenon, from which he borrows not the 'martial art' itself, but the blandly invincible hero and the nonstop string of gymnastically stylised fights.



'The Wanderers'

The notion of a battle in which hordes are formally defeated without a blow being noticeably struck obviously appeals to Ichikawa's sense of the absurd; and he batters gleefully on to the formula, with swords flashing and striking apparently of their own volition out of the darkness as in *An Actor's Revenge*, and punctuating shots of spurting blood now and again indicating that even games have their consequences.

The film begins marvellously with a broodingly ominous shot of three figures silhouetted against a doorway, shrouded in ragged cloaks and inverted fish-basket hats. They are *toseinin*, a narrator helpfully explains; a 19th century breed of peasant samurai, they are farmers who have left a miserable existence on the land to become itinerant gamblers, sometimes serving an overlord, sometimes freelancing, but always bound by the obscure rites and obligations of a brotherhood. While the narrator expounds on their password greeting (a rambling affair involving ritual Japanese courtesy—no, you speak first; no, *you*—carried to absurd lengths and the eventual ceremonial offering of a dish-cloth), Ichikawa cuts to a series of deliberately disconnected close-ups which leave one uncertain as to exactly who is who or what is going on until, after two excruciating repetitions of the whole formula, the inscrutably exasperated host interrupts the third with a bombshell of *lèse-majesté*. 'Why don't we just drop all this?' he asks his stunned trio of visitors, hustling them on to the next stage of the ceremony, which involves tea and the consumption of two bowls of rice.

With its gradual revelation of formalities to be observed, and the minutely calculated variations in the levels of hospitality offered in different houses (as well as assorted social reactions from the guests), this whole opening segment is vintage Ichikawa. Then follows a rather statutory but pleasing flurry of action—one battle taking place in a closed room, another in a mist-swathed field at dawn—since the *toseinin* must fight for their host, if required, after accepting his hospitality: a curious mixture of hieratic Japanese gestures and Hong Kong knockabout, of comic-strip formality and bloody brutality in which, as the narrator observes, the main point is to cross swords rather than fight to the death, but in which deaths unfortunately will occur, incurring great expense since each side hires mercenaries in order to put up a more imposing front.

After this the plot catches up on Ichikawa, and the film plods rather laboriously through

dull acres in which one of the *toseinin* meets a pretty young wife whom he eventually runs away with, and also is coerced into killing his own father because his first obligation is to his host. Gradually, however, one realises that the familiar Ichikawa trap is beginning to close, and the film gets on top of itself again with a quizzical questioning of social pressures. Motivated purely by his society's conception of duty into killing his father, the young hero finds himself outcast as a patricide; motivated purely by pity for the girl (who is treated as a slave by her elderly husband), he takes her with him in his escape, and is forced to sell her into slavery in order to survive. Outlawed even by outlaws, morally cut off from his friends (one dies from a snake-bite sent, so they feel, by the gods as a punishment for the patricide; the other wants to abandon the *toseinin* code to perpetrate an iniquitous but profitable double-cross), there is only one place left for him: on the rubbish dump, like Maciek in *Ashes and Diamonds*.

In fact the film ends with casual, graceful absurdity in a fight between the hero and his surviving friend over the proposed double-cross. A discarded cloak billowing in the air to lie forgotten in the dust of the roadway; a dozen rapidly alternating shots, punctuated by one electrifying slow-motion image of a sword whistling within an inch of a startled face, as the protagonists formally 'cross swords'; then the adversary is running away to avoid the inevitable 'fight to the death', and the hero, retreating in relief, stumbles off the road and down a bank to hit his head, with sickening finality, on a rock. Returning to shake and make up, the friend gazes in puzzlement at the empty roadway and the abandoned cloak. 'He must be taking a shit somewhere,' he says unconcernedly. Momentarily, at least, one glimpses an echo of that 'filthy world' upon which the heroes of *Fires on the Plain* and *Conflagration* tried to impose their own purity, and which finally defeated them.

TOM MILNE

The Spirit of the Beehive

A small Castilian village snoozes in the afternoon haze; a father casually busies himself with his beehive; a mother, secluded in a room filtered by an orange sun, dreamily writes letters to some faraway, perhaps imaginary, lover; and their two small daughters, Isabel and Ana, excitedly watch James Whale's *Franken-*

stein in the makeshift village cinema. Thus, in the first five minutes, director Victor Erice places his characters firmly in an authentic environment (the time is just after the Spanish Civil War and the parents seem too involved in their personal ennui to acknowledge their children's preoccupations) and hints at the theme about to be unfolded.

Discussing the film that night in bed, the younger sister Ana reveals her fascination with the scene where the small girl picks a flower and gives it to the Monster. Isabel replies that a Monster can be a friendly spirit evoked by certain magic words like 'Soriano, Soriano.' Her young imagination now inflamed, Ana seems to find the spirit everywhere: in an anatomy class at school, even in a rather sinister game when Isabel feigns death (beautifully caught with the camera following Ana through the shadowy house as she looks for help, culminating in the sudden reappearance of the sister), and most potently when Ana helps a runaway soldier hiding in a nearby barn.

Erice's triumph here is not only to make the children's fantasies tangible enough for us to feel them as well, but to bend the present obsession of the Spanish cinema with macabre subjects to his own purpose; rejecting the Hammer-like horrors and Hitchcock borrowings of his fellow directors, he has created a dream world where, even in the darkness outside, strangers and monsters can take on a benevolent aspect and respond with love. Using imagery full of burnished yellows and browns reflecting the dry, country exteriors (finely shot by Luis Cuadrado), Erice turns even an over-familiar idea—the children listening for an approaching train on a deserted track—into a poetic event climaxed by a ravishing shot of the two tiny figures dwarfed by the flashing mechanical monster. Everything that surrounds them—sun-flecked forest, encrusted garden, the huddled fugitive in the barn isolated in the open plain—carries its own mystery, culminating in the last trauma in the forest when Ana finally sees the Monster reflected in a stream (and looking a little like her father as well as Boris Karloff), which results in an illness that finally brings the parents together.

Erice's only previous work was an episode in a sketch film called *Los Desafíos* produced, like the present picture, by Elias Querejeta, that formidable promoter of new Spanish talents. This new film, utilising a precisely studied camera style reflecting Erice's declared passion for Sternberg, shows no signs of being a prentice work. Visually alive from first shot to last, it turns the house itself into a kaleidoscope of filtered shadows, with figures constantly moving out of darkness into light. Occasionally, an air of calculation intrudes as a particularly choice composition is savoured for a fraction too long—yet it seems churlish to complain of over-abundance in a film so richly aware of the power of its images, rather than its sparse dialogue, to suggest and connect.

Throughout, there are allusions not entirely clear to a foreign audience: some visual evidence is given that the father was a supporter of the Republican cause, and the hounded creature in the barn could be a Republican soldier (or deserter?). Yet even without full knowledge of this added layer of allegory, the film works supremely well as an evocation of childhood, aided immeasurably by the quite miraculous performances Erice has elicited from his tiny players, Isabel Telleria and Ana Torrent. The latter in particular, with her weebegone, drawn face and rather petulant air, completely carries such difficult moments as her meeting with the benevolent Monster at night and the final scene when, after partially exorcising her sadness, she advances to the window, looks up at the baleful moon and remembers that she still has the power to call him back—Soriano, Soriano.

JOHN GILLET

Ludwig—Requiem for a Virgin King/One Hamlet Less/The Lindsay Kemp Circus

Many of the features on show at the Festival evidenced what might be described as a crisis in communication in the commercial cinema, and especially in those films which chose to operate outside the conventions of a particular genre. Narratives stubbornly refuse to accommodate the breadth of an artist's concerns, or perversely serve only to weaken his integrity by restricting him to one primary level of discourse in the film. On the one hand, a young director like Alain Tanner in *Retour d'Afrique* is so concerned to express the political tensions besetting his young couple that he loses all perspective on them, reducing his analysis to an embarrassingly sophomoric level and ultimately side-stepping the issues altogether; on the other, a veteran director like Ichikawa in *The Wanderers* is so preoccupied with his formal experiments with the filmic language that he allows his content to lapse into banal and inexpressive melodrama. None the less, several film-makers avoided tying themselves in such knots. The most conspicuously successful were those working within the Surrealist tradition and, perhaps not coincidentally, all of them chose an overtly theatrical idiom.

Borowczyk's prologue to *Immoral Tales*, a short called *Une Collection Particulière* in which André Pieyre de Mandiargues presents his collection of erotic art and objects, defines the form precisely. Mandiargues, like a half-glimpsed scene-changer, arranges each exhibit in front of the camera, operating its mechanisms or demonstrating its application. The 'performers' are the objects, and the duration of each object's performance is determined solely by its repertoire of effects. With the 'action' thus taking care of itself, Borowczyk is free to explore his real centres of interest: the mechanics of seeing and of stimulation, and the fine line between vision and voyeurism.

Celestino Coronado's short portrait of Lindsay Kemp's mime troupe, *The Lindsay Kemp Circus*, uses an equally simple, defined form to examine human performers. Coronado begins and ends his film with tracking shots moving towards and away from a small toy stage, whose curtain is raised and lowered; there is no 'action' on the toy stage—rather, the action is translated into the film form, so that the tracking shots express anticipation, or satisfaction, or a childlike sense of wonder. The main body of the film, shot amongst the bare concrete and discarded props of a theatre stage, presents Kemp and his co-star Orlando in a series of short sketches, filmed in the manner of Méliès and his successors, the great comics of the silent cinema. Coronado uses the most direct visual language possible: static shots, occasional gentle pans to follow the performance, sparing close-ups like visual exclamation marks. One of his aims is to suggest that there is little distinction between Kemp's performances and his life off-stage; his beautifully uncomplicated syntax allows him to do this through simple cut-aways to side angles of the performances, showing the non-participating members of the troupe in the 'wings', as much a part of the seedy ambience as the actors.

Carmelo Bene's *One Hamlet Less* opts for baroque extravagance rather than minimal precision, but his exuberant re-interpretation of the play (by way of Laforgue's story outline) is equally out-front with its artifice. Bene's Hamlet is a frustrated playwright, romantically impressionable and confused; his soliloquies are scraps torn from handy volumes in the library and tossed contemptuously to an embittered Horatio, the court is a stage full of players anarchically resisting Hamlet's dreams of a script, and he enjoys a hitherto undisclosed liaison with Kate, lead actress to the court.



'Ludwig—Requiem for a Virgin King': Harry Baer

Bene's vision is at once satiric (in its implicit demolition of previous versions of the play) and energetically committed (in its celebration of Hamlet's crazed confusion over the menace of the—literally—faceless monarch who takes the throne). Both ways, his emphasis on theatrical contrivance in the action permits him to eliminate the need for formal narrative cogency, and enjoy instead the luxuries of pure style without merely superimposing it on the content. The film is an organised riot of colour and motion, with Bene (the director rather than the actor) the prestidigitator who can change black to white, sets to locations, sense to nonsense.

Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Ludwig—Requiem for a Virgin King* is even more elaborately contrived. Its two parts, *Der Fluch* (*The Curse*) and *Ich war einmal* (*Once I Was*), deal respectively with the historical facts and lore about Ludwig's reign, and the mythological perspective that the passage of a century has brought to the figure. Syberberg rejects the possibility of a narrative exposition; he mounts each episode as a theatrical playlet, prefaced by an introductory caption, and films each with a rigorously static camera, avoiding editing whenever possible. Each scene is enacted in front of a projected backdrop (some of them apparently scenic

designs for Bayreuth), and Syberberg carefully graduates the light falling on to his actors, so that those nearest the camera are brightest lit, and those further off tend to match the visual texture of the backdrops. Both staging and acting are highly stylised; and Syberberg introduces such Brechtian devices as the casting of two actors as Wagner (a dwarf and a white-faced woman, man and muse) and studied anachronisms (there are direct references to post-Weimar Germany and America) as further distanciations. The result is a dramatised documentary that for once begs no questions. The director is able to examine Ludwig to the full extent of his understanding of the man, by recognising that the legend is as pertinent as the fact, and that at this remove neither can be taken at more than face value.

The bizarre extravagances of invention in these films, the quicksilver changes in tone and inflection, and the outrageous humour, in each case have as an objective correlative the precise formal integrity of the works. Recognition of the content as theatrical contrivance is a big step towards this integrity . . . and one that incidentally restores to the cinema the magic of Méliès' honest illusions.

TONY RAYNS

'The Spirit of the Beehive': Isabel Telleria, Ana Torrent



BOOK REVIEWS

DOCUMENTARY DIARY

By Paul Rotha

SECKER AND WARBURG, £3.75

The term 'documentary' to describe a particular kind of film-making was, as Paul Rotha points out, first used in 1926, when Grierson applied it to Flaherty's second film, *Moana*. The concept of the documentary he traces to its origins at the University of Chicago, where Walter Lippman had pointed out that in a modern state the ordinary citizen was necessarily ignorant or ill-informed on a large number of important issues and that therefore truly democratic citizenship was impossible. The outcome of discussions of this proposition was a theory of film based 'on the observation of the ordinary or the actual and the discovery within the actual of the patterns which gave it significance for civic education.'

What Paul Rotha describes in *Documentary Diary* is the process whereby—chiefly in Britain—this concept was embodied in a range of films. It was a process to which he made an important and lasting contribution. What is sad is that he should have cluttered his account with the details of personal reminiscence and padded it so liberally with letters and extracts from diaries. He had an opportunity to make an appraisal of the documentary movement which was in his own words 'sociologically and aesthetically unique.' His book must be judged a lost opportunity.

Yet he raises a number of important issues. There is, first of all, the question of patronage. Grierson was able to begin work as a documentary film-maker because he won the patronage of Sir Stephen Tallents, head of the Empire Marketing Board—a body which depended on the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and was dedicated to imperial preference and trade war. (As I write I have on the wall behind me one of its posters: 'Be British!') It says, 'Buy Empire Bananas!') Grierson had won Tallents over to an interest in the potential of documentary film-making by exposing to him a philosophy which was very close in its formulation to that of the Chicago school. 'If life was to yield its riches,' Tallents quoted him as saying, 'then the raw material of life must be worked up by processes which would elicit not merely the bare facts but its essentially dramatic qualities.'

It is arguable that Grierson in becoming a client of the Board was only doing what many people have done since—exploiting the contradictions within the Establishment to achieve their own artistic or expressive ends. But Grierson had also rather vague political aspirations. 'Documentary,' he said 'was born and nurtured on the bandwagon of uprising social democracy everywhere; in Western Europe and the United States, as well as in Britain.' Whether he hoped to achieve something political is not entirely clear from Paul Rotha's account; what is clear from this particular statement, written at a time when social democracy was about to be destroyed by Fascism in one European country after another, is that he was politically naive.

The main question is therefore whether the documentary performed the function its inventors intended it to fulfil or not. Was its political intention—however vague—realised? There were some critics in the 1930s who questioned the political effectiveness of the Grierson school. One of them, whom Paul Rotha quotes at length, was Arthur Calder-Marshall, who, while conceding that the British school of documentary film-makers had reached a very high standard, described their work as 'false-to-life, true-to-life documentaries.' Their defects he traced precisely to the official patronage which Grierson and others so readily accepted. Speaking of the GPO Film Unit he said: 'Mr. Grierson is not paid to tell the truth but to make more people use the parcel post.'

This is an attack which Paul Rotha attempts to parry feebly. What else, he asks, could the film-makers have done, given the sponsors they had? Then he shifts his ground to say that, in any case, it was better that their work should have seen the light of day than not; shifts it again by arguing that *Song of Ceylon*, that lyrical film—some of which it appears was shot in Kew Gardens—'carried implicit but nevertheless significant comment on the low industrial status of native labour in that island.' It is an argument with which we are all familiar; it is one those of us who work in the documentary field still use to defend our work. For the problems of patronage are still with us and it is still necessary to attempt to exploit the cracks in the Establishment. In the long run, however, the excuses begin to look thin.

Grierson is quoted by Paul Rotha as saying that the documentary movement was an 'anti-aesthetic' one. I believe it possible to argue that what Grierson and the pre-war documentary film-makers did was precisely to aestheticise reality, to aestheticise labour and ordinary men and women, and that this approach to film-making, together with the acceptance of a kind of patronage beside which the patronage of the television companies is positively revolutionary—compare *Drifters* with the Granada documentary on the Fleetwood trawlers—laid the guidelines for those 'objective', 'balanced' documentaries which the BBC, in particular, has produced over the years.

Paul Rotha's narrative stops short of an examination of the wartime work of the Crown Film Unit. There is therefore no discussion of the work of that unit on the propaganda films which enlisted the technique of making 'false-to-life, true-to-life' films to the propaganda machine, which accepted the most reactionary mythologies about British life and dealt with stereotypes of the cheerful Cockney, of the West Countryman and the Scotsman, and gave them a spurious reality. The results of this acceptance of stereotypes were clear to anyone who saw the wartime films projected at the 1973 seminar on the subject at the Imperial War Museum—an occasion which, like Paul Rotha's book, was cluttered with personal reminiscence and anecdote when what was required was analysis, criticism and honest revaluation. It is a task which requires to be done. Paul Rotha has passed up the opportunity.

STUART HOOD

WHAT THE CENSOR SAW

By John Trevelyan

MICHAEL JOSEPH, £4.00

Even if John Trevelyan seemed sometimes too good to be true—able to charm and disarm anyone, whatever and however militant their cause; limitlessly flexible; uncannily shrewd not just in 'accepting the rate and direction of society' (as Dr. Aaron Stern defined their job) but also in anticipating the process—he was still the best censor we ever had. Fearless of the limelight, he focused the censorship role on himself, gave it a personality where it had formerly been faceless, and made a process that had always been wrapped in mystification and secrecy, inescapably open and newsworthy.

This of course proves a slight disadvantage when Trevelyan comes to write his memoirs: he has already told so much that he has no reserve of sensational revelations to titillate the Sundays. It is fascinating all the same to learn of his difficult relations with Herbert Morrison, who regarded near blindness (resentfully attributed to reading subtitles on foreign films) as no disqualification for the job of President of the

BBFC. And it is interesting to get it all together at last, to see the dramas of *The Garden of Eden* (the first misty views of nudity), *Hugs and Kisses* (the pubic hair confrontation) and Trevelyan's dramatic dash up Tottenham Court Road to champion *Flesh*, in the whole context of the evolution of public taste and social acceptance.

What is clear, too, is that the single and fundamental quality that supremely fitted John Trevelyan for his role, quite apart from his genius for PR, was that finally he is wholly opposed to censorship. In the 'Postscript' to his book he says categorically, 'I do not think that film censorship should be abolished, but I think it should now be modified.' And then slyly goes on to outline a system which is not censorship at all but would give the BBFC the role of classifying the suitability of films; and then bring in measures to penalise severely those who exposed the very young to material classified as potentially harmful to them.

All his experience, all his intelligence and all his study in the end only demonstrate the impossibility of establishing authorities to control the communication of ideas, without opening the way to the conscious abuses of censorship by political interests, or the unconscious ones of ignorance and bigotry and prejudice. The Customs, it is alleged, once seized a film on occupational therapy for sick children called *Games in Bed*. As late as 1960 London Transport banned the use of Rodin's 'Le Baiser' on a poster for *Les Amants*. As late as 1964 one of Trevelyan's lady examiners at the Board could write: 'We don't want shots of white women's breasts if such shots can be avoided.'

Even wise Trevelyan's own judgments occasionally hint at the dangers of subjectivity and the fallibility of logic in the imprecise territory of taste and censorship: 'We became a little more tolerant of Scandinavian films since it was generally accepted in this country that in Scandinavia people bathe in the nude.' Of continental sex films: 'It was quite common for us to remove up to a quarter of any such film; what we left seemed to do reasonable business.' 'They always show a male orgasm, which is not an attractive sight.' 'The sex was natural, but not what one would find in the normal British home.' Of Makavejev's *The Switchboard Operator*, which perhaps most severely tested Trevelyan's admirably intended but peril-fraught distinction between 'films of quality' and 'films made for commercial profit': 'It received enthusiastic notices from leading critics. I found this hard to understand, and so did Lord Harlech.'

But when all is said and done, the British cinema may rejoice in the operation of a censorship board which makes it possible for Peter Rogers and Gerald Thomas to decide 'that the "A" category would give them a bit more freedom for sex and lavatory jokes.'

DAVID ROBINSON

ON CUKOR

By Gavin Lambert
W. H. ALLEN, £3.00

ON FILM MAKING

By King Vidor
W. H. ALLEN, £2.75

Of two lightweight books, *On Cukor* is the more disappointing because it could have been so much better. Or perhaps it couldn't. Gavin Lambert contributes a stylish introduction to Cukor as one of Hollywood's supremely elegant stylists, though his back-up quotation from Henri Langlois on the quintessence of Cukor—'knowledge of the world'—sounds like translationese for *connaissance du monde* and would surely be more appropriately rendered as 'worldly wise'. The rest of the book is interview material, and there's the rub.

Having done his homework well, Lambert launches interestingly into many of the lesser known films as well as the old favourites, but more often than not (e.g. *Tarnished Lady*, *Zaza*) his enthusiasms are stymied by a response of 'I don't remember that too well.' It's an old hazard of interviewing, especially with veteran directors, but frustration is doubled when Lambert introduces his *Zaza* section by saying '... you know I screened *Zaza* last night and liked it?' Couldn't Cukor have been pushed, pulled or persuaded to the screening?

Cukor is a fine conversationalist, of course, as everyone knows who has read his interviews, and the book makes pleasant, civilised reading; but as those people who have read the interviews will also know, most of the anecdotes told here (W. C. Fields' cup of tea and wastepaper basket in *David Copperfield*, Jean Simmons giggling at Spencer Tracy's heavy father in *The Actress*) are more or less verbatim repeats. The only new note is a tinge of bitterness against the 'youth orientated' Hollywood of today: understandable but somewhat rebarbative when, for the umpteenth time, Cukor rhetorically grumbles about how 'they' would do it today (of the resplendent *Little Women*, 'Wouldn't they want one of the girls to be fighting for civil rights or something?'). There is a filmography, incidentally, but no list of Cukor's stage productions; and the stills could have been better chosen, laid out and captioned.

Vidor's book is a sort of *vade mecum* addressed to that depressing creature the tyro film-maker, whom one imagines sitting in his lonely room wondering whether to plump for 16 or 70 mm, a Bell and Howell or an Arriflex, studio or location. Vidor offers him a wealth of practical information and avuncular advice, sketching in a brief history of the development of motion pictures, explaining how a big production is set up, explaining the meaning of mysterious technical terms, and explaining how to avoid the pitfalls in sundry matters

such as editing, background music and special effects.

Like Cukor's conversation, it is all civilised, sensible, and packed with the experience of a distinguished career. The most interesting sections of the book, however, are those in which he supplements his autobiography *A Tree is a Tree*: a fascinatingly detailed description of how he shot the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*, for instance, as well as shorter passages on how he tricked up the opera house and duel scenes in the same film, or took over from Victor Fleming to film the 'Over the Rainbow' number in *The Wizard of Oz*.

TOM MILNE

Letters

L'Age d'Or Prize

SIR,—We would be most grateful if you would bring to the attention of your readers the L'AGE D'OR PRIZE, organised by the Royal Film Archive of Belgium, which takes place in March 1974.

A prize of 100,000 francs is to be given, each year, to a feature film whose inventive and cinematographic qualities show evidence of a freethinking and subversive spirit, comparable, for our time, with Buñuel's in 1930.

Further information and entry forms may be obtained on demand at the Royal Film Archive of Belgium, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 23 rue Ravenstein, 1000 Bruxelles.

Yours faithfully,
JACQUES LEDOUX
Curator

Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels.

Les Noces Rouges

SIR,—David L. Overbey, in his review of *Les Noces Rouges* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1973), has seriously misrepresented certain key points of the work. When Lucienne's daughter writes to the police, it is certainly not because 'she chooses to become her step-father's daughter, a part of the closed and repressive society which has given her legitimacy.' If Mr. Overbey had considered the relevance of the quotation from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* at the beginning of the film, he might have seen that Chabrol's irony is more subtle than such a weakly motivated *volte-face* would indicate.

In the Greek play, Orestes, having put his mother, Clytemnestra, to death for her part in the slaying of his father, Agamemnon, seeks justice from Pallas Athene. She hears the pleas of the Furies, who demand revenge on Clytemnestra's

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behalf for the shedding of kindred blood, and of Orestes himself, who became a matricide lest he be guilty of impiety in neglecting revenge for his father's death. The suit is referred by her to a tribunal of Athenian judges and, when the voting is equal, Athene casts her vote in Orestes' favour so that, through her agency, he is acquitted, and judged by her to be innocent.

In Chabrol's film, Pierre is Aegistheus to Lucienne's Clytemnestra. Like those characters of Greek myth, they are driven by circumstances apparently beyond their control to murder Paul/Agamemnon so that their affair may continue and may, ultimately, be legitimised. Lucienne's daughter, in the absence of any other children, must combine the roles of Electra and Orestes. The parallels so far are easy to spot. Yet, there is no moral law in either the society depicted by Aeschylus or that of the film which demands that this child avenge this father's death, because he is merely an adoptive father.

Lucienne's downfall is due to her daughter's letter. Athene must again acquit a matricide, because the letter was written in a disastrously tenacious spirit of filial piety. The child has shown herself to be willing to accept her mother's illicit liaison, and the signs are that she would protect her mother also if she were a murderess. Before she decides to write to the police, she begs Lucienne to be completely honest with her; when her mother

assures her with a great show of earnestness that she is not involved with the death, the daughter acts as any loyal child might, in a bid to save her mother's reputation. The irony is twofold, at the most conservative count: the daughter's devotion to the ties of blood results in the most abhorrent (though unintentional) transgression of kinship laws, matricide; then, too, Lucienne's ruin is directly attributable to her own breach of faith with her daughter. She is the agent, her daughter merely the instrument, of her end.

Finally, Mr. Overbey claims that there is no Hélène this time. There is: she is the daughter. 'Chabrol has said that Hélène is partially a creature of myth.' And once again she is.

Yours faithfully,

J. KENNETH MACKINNON
London, NW1 9AP

Cut Versions

SIR,—On reading David Wilson's article about *O Lucky Man!* in the Summer SIGHT AND SOUND, I was annoyed to find that at least two of the scenes in the version he saw were missing in that now on general release. Both were in the section following the hero's discharge from prison, one where his pockets are picked as he hands over his prison pay packet at a Salvation Army meeting, the other where he fails to dissuade a working-class woman from suicide.

Also it seems that Peckinpah's

forebodings about the studio's treatment of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* were justified (Jan Aghed's article in the Spring issue). Splendid as are most of the individual scenes, their assemblage shows all the editorial style of a rough cut, a parallel to the case of *Major Dundee*. Gone is the promised prologue where Garrett himself is killed; Bob Dylan's role as it stands surely cannot have attracted him to his acting debut. Have cuts been made in order to fit the film into a double bill, as I saw it?

It would be interesting to have both Anderson's and Peckinpah's reaction to the botching of their work.

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT STOKER

Birmingham, B13 9LB

First in Ghana

SIR,—It's a critic's privilege to misjudge, less so to misinform. Gideon Bachmann deserves a rap on the knuckles for his flippant piece on film in Ghana (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1973). Surely he could have avoided those stale clichés about the heat, humidity and smells of West Africa. His remarks about the immobility and complacency of African culture are less than accurate—but then with an indigenous cultural tradition of hundreds of years, what else can a two-week stay yield but a still of that movie?

He could get his facts right too. I saw Ghana's first full-length feature film in the Rex Cinema, Accra, back in 1968: an adaptation of *Hamlet* ('Gamlet'), directed, if my memory serves me, by Terry Bishop. Transposed to the Northern Ghana kingdom of the Gonja the film, if not wholly successful, nor wholly Ghanaian, was a first for the country's infant film industry and deserves recognition as such.

Yours faithfully,

ANDREW MILLER

East Molesey, Surrey.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID DENBY has written for *Film Quarterly*, *The Atlantic*, *New York Times*, etc., and for the last three years has edited the American National Society of Film Critics' annual anthology . . . SETH FELDMAN is a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo and is writing a thesis on the work of Dziga Vertov. He intends to follow this with a study of American documentary in the 1930s . . . STUART HOOD is Professor of Film and Television at the Royal College of Art . . . PAUL SEYDOR studied journalism at Pennsylvania State University, writing his master's thesis on the criticism of Pauline Kael, and is now at the University of Iowa. Has written for *Film Society Review* (now *Film Critic*) and other publications . . . DANIEL YERGIN is a Bostonian who is completing a PhD in international relations at Cambridge; also writes on films as a freelance.

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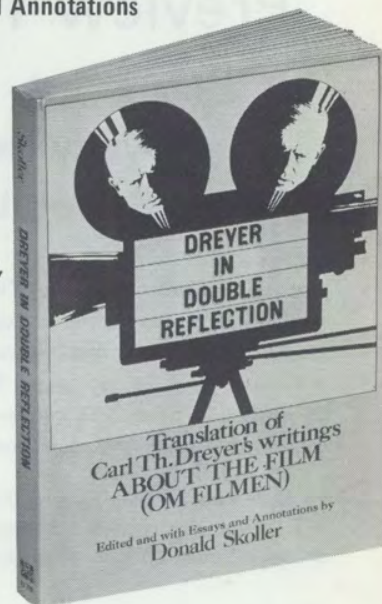
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ADVENTURES OF BARRY MCKENZIE, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Barry Humphries' bovine Australian, freshly minted from the *Private Eye* strip, chunders his way through the London scene embarrassing all and sundry. A wildly uneven concoction of antipodean bad taste, probably only fully appreciated by Earls Court exiles. (Barry Crocker, Barry Humphries; director, Bruce Beresford.)

**ANDREI RUBLEV

(Columbia-Warner)
Tarkovsky's marathon masterpiece, about the legendary 15th century icon painter and the boy who casts a bell. Perhaps the major Russian film of the 1960s, and extremely imposing even in the somewhat truncated form in which it has finally reached us. (Anatoly Solonitsyn, Nicolai Burlayev.)

APE AND SUPER-APE (Gala)

Hectoring documentary survey of the point where man meets animal—and where many a TV film team has already been to better effect. Splendid wildlife photography which should have been allowed to speak for itself. (Director, Bert Haanstra.)

**ASYLUM (Other Cinema)

Laingian theory as practised in the Archway Community, which offers a place of refuge and recovery away from the apparatus of hospitals and psychiatrists. Peter Robinson's film is lucid and restrained, documenting not so much individual crises as the Community's peculiar domestic equilibrium. (Ronald D. Laing, Dr. Leon Redler.)

BELSTONE FOX, THE

(Fox-Rank)
Unconvincing tale of a fox who thinks he's a hound. Predictably follows the anti-blood sports trail while simultaneously indulging the chasers and the chased. (Eric Porter, Rachel Roberts, Jeremy Kemp; director, James Hill.)

*BIG BOSS, THE (Cathay)

The film that launched the Bruce Lee myth, a simplistic factory floor morality tale in which the plot is secondary to the *kung-fu* antics of the star. An engaging testament to dynamic hyperbole. (Maria Yi Yi, James Tien; director, Lo Wei.)

CATCH MY SOUL (Fox-Rank)

Painfully inadequate adaptation of the rock musical (preacher-man Othello among the Jesus freaks) which has lost its one virtue (the original songs) and replaces Shakespeare's poetry and stagecraft with inconceivable pseudo-religious banalities. (Richie Havens, Lance LeGault, Season Hubley; director, Patrick McGeehan.)

CLASS OF '44 (Columbia-Warner)

Two years on from *Summer of '42*, with the gawky high school trio let loose on college and the army (men were going to war then). Nostalgia laid on in unwieldy slabs, at the expense of any genuine period sense. (Gary Grimes, Jerry Houser, Deborah Winters; director, Paul Bogart.)

**DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE, THE (VPS)

The fall of Weimar and the rise of Hitler, assembled as a collage of newsreel and clips from the films of the period. A fascinating attempt to explain a still bewildering historical phenomenon from a social perspective. (Director, Lutz Becker.)

**ELECTRA GLIDE IN BLUE (United Artists)

First feature by James William Guercio, who pulls off some bravura shifts of style—from black comedy to Kubrick pastiche and a mildly allegorical fable about the death of dreams. When in doubt about how to hang his story together, Guercio falls back on Conrad Hall's stunning photography. (Robert Blake, Billy 'Green' Bush, Mitchell Ryan.) Reviewed.

*EL TOPO (ABKCO)

Jodorowsky's limbering-up exercise for *The Holy Mountain*, a three-ring circus disguised as an Italian Western, whose 'hero' guns his way through *rites de passage*, metaphysics, sainthood and martyrdom with a constant glare of crazed determination. The juggernaut Biblical allegory subsumes more parodies, references and philosophies than it can hope to digest. (Alexandro Jodorowsky, Mara Lorenzio.) Reviewed.

40 CARATS (Columbia-Warner)

Liv Ullmann, sadly miscast as a 40-year-old divorcee, trembles interminably on the brink before deciding to marry a man eighteen years her junior. Romantic comedy, sagging at the knees. (Gene Kelly, Binnie Barnes, Edward Albert; director, Milton Katselas.)

*FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE, THE (CIC)

Peter Yates keeps the machinery properly purring in this elaborately detailed thriller about familial problems in the underworld. The predicament—and the character—of Eddie Coyle get lost in the works, however, and Mitchum's weighty presence rather neutralises the seedy villainy established by the script. (Peter Boyle, Richard Jordan.)

FURY (Fox-Rank)

Risibly overblown adaptation of a Lermontov novel about revolutionary stirrings in 18th century Russia. An Anglo-Italian co-production, it puts Bolshevik fervour, private passions and rhubarbing peasants through the mincer to produce, in the performances of Oliver Reed and John McEnery, pure chopped ham. (Carol André, Claudia Cardinale; director, Antonio Calenda.)

**GAS! (New Realm)

Corman's long-overdue comedy parodies every 'youth pic' from *Zabriskie Point* to *The Trip* and achieves along the way a more accurate social panorama than any of them. Littered with throwaway gems of dialogue and visual detail, the movie more than justifies its euphoric ending. (Robert Corff, George Armitage, Country Joe McDonald.)

*HARRY IN YOUR POCKET (United Artists)

Not uninteresting account of the gambits employed by a gang of pickpockets, though much too concerned with the amorous complications caused by a female of the species (Trish Van Devere). In technical matters, the film comes a poor second to Bresson's *Pickpocket*. (James Coburn, Michael Sarrazin, Walter Pidgeon; director, Bruce Geller.)

HONOR THY FATHER (Fox-Rank)

Low-key story of internecine warfare among the American Mafia families in the wake of the Valachi

revelations. Made for television and shows it, though Paul Wendkos directs the few action sequences with some style. (Joseph Bologna, Raf Vallone.)

**INTIMATE CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN (MGM-EMI)

Ladies' night at the *kung-fu* club, with the spirited heroine press-ganged into brothel service and enduring every kind of sexual assault before exacting her Jacobean-style revenge. But in Chu Yuan's hands the melodrama undergoes a sea change into pure pulp poetry: exquisitely textured visuals, labyrinthine patterns of oppression and betrayal. (Lily Ho, Yueh Hua, Betty.)

*KING, QUEEN, KNAVE (LMG)

Sadly underrated Skolimowski film, adapted from Nabokov's novel about an unholy triangle. Marvellous performances; stylish visual comedy; above all, an astonishing feeling for Nabokov's playfully poetic malice. (Gina Lollobrigida, David Niven, John Moulder-Brown.) Reviewed.

LOL-LYMA DONNA WAR, THE (MGM-EMI)

The Martins and the McCoys are put to shame by these embattled hillbillies. An absurd confection from a director with an eye for allegory but too little notion of how to marshal his plot. (Rod Steiger, Robert Ryan, Jeff Bridges; director, Richard C. Sarafian.)

LOUISE (Columbia-Warner)

A cross-generation love story, set in picturesque Annecy. Philippe de Broca works hard to turn a bitter-sweet slice of sentiment into tough-minded romance, but only the presence of Jeanne Moreau hints at more intriguing dimensions. (Julian Negulesco, Didi Perego.)

**MACKINTOSH MAN, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Paul Newman as agent who is sent to jail to penetrate top prisoners' escape organisation run by high Tory MP James Mason. A curiously dishevelled script provides groundwork for one of Huston's more blarneying entertainments, veering from simple-mindedness to sophistication according to the mood of the moment. (Dominique Sanda, Ian Bannen.) Reviewed.

MALIZIA (Columbia-Warner)

In intention, a sharp dig at bourgeois sexual hypocrisy, with a bereaved family (father and sons) buzzing round the honeypot of their new maid. What emerges is mainly toothless farce, occasionally funny, about an adolescent's frustrated longings. (Laura Antonelli, Alessandro Momo; director, Salvatore Samperi.)

MAN CALLED NOON, THE (Scotia-Barber)

Arty-crafty Western about an amnesiac, led to believe he is a wicked gunslinger, who finds (surprise, surprise) that he's really the gallant hero. As the story (told backwards) is unravelled, so is its banality. (Richard Crenna, Stephen Boyd, Rossanna Schiaffino; director, Peter Collinson.)

*PAPER MOON (CIC)

Bogdanovich returns to black-and-white nostalgia, combining the central ploys of *Elmer Gantry* and *Bonnie and Clyde* as he sends a middle-aged Bible salesman and a precocious nine-year-old orphan bumping in an old jalopy over a still Depressed Midwest. Accomplished performances (Ryan O'Neal and his real-life daughter) and witty repartee don't entirely camouflage the cuteness. (Madeleine Kahn.)

SCARECROW (Columbia-Warner)

The Great American Odyssey once more, in the company of two

down-at-heel losers. Ex-convict Max believes might makes right; happy-go-lucky Leon thinks the whole world loves a joker. Jerry Schatzberg underlines the schematism of the script with direction which turns every casual exchange into a set-piece. (Gene Hackman, Al Pacino.)

*SERPENT, THE (MGM-EMI)

Valiant attempt to evoke the serpentine complexities of an international spy scandal bearing resemblances (not accidental) to the Philby affair. Made watchable by good performances (Noiret, Bouquet, Bogarde, Brynner) and borrowed stylistic devices (Melville, Frankheimer), but let down with a rude bump by Verneuil's ready lapses into bathos. (Henry Fonda, Virna Lisi.)

*SSSSNAKE (CIC)

Old-fashioned horror about an ecology-minded mad doctor tinkering with human evolution. Directed in a pleasingly solid, robust way by Bernard L. Kowalski, quite successfully taking in a smattering of snake lore and even making something credible of its human characters. (Strother Martin, Dirk Benedict, Heather Menzies.)

**STING, THE (CIC)

Son of *Butch Cassidy*, with Newman and Redford translated to the Chicago of 1936 and gleefully staging a blockbusting confidence trick among the racketeers. Great fun despite—once again—over-insistent appeals for approval. (Director, George Roy Hill.) Reviewed.

*THREE IN THE CELLAR (New Realm)

Theodore Flicker's follow-up to *The President's Analyst* good-naturedly escalates campus revolt into areas of military government, hippie mysticism, 'Free but Decent Speech' leagues and the obstacles to miscegenation. An overly schematic plot stifles invention around the middle, but the satire is sustained and the performances delightful. (Wes Stern, Larry Hagman, Nira Barab.)

**TOUT VA BIEN (Other Cinema)

Godard and Gorin consolidate the gains of their researches into a politicised cinema with a return to narrative and stars. The plot is *Love Story* minus TB, plus the class struggle; the issues are truthfully confused, divisive and open-ended; and the result is a genuine breakthrough in radical/commercial cinema. (Jane Fonda, Yves Montand.)

VAULT OF HORROR (Fox-Rank)

Second compendium from the William Gaines horror comics. Unimaginative scripting and stolid direction make it—despite the excellent source material—rather less appetising than the hardly lustrous *Tales from the Crypt*. (Daniel Massey, Terry-Thomas, Curt Jurgens; director, Roy Ward Baker.)

*WAY WE WERE, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Sidney Pollack revisits the recent past with a 'political love story' pivoted on the harassment of the Hollywood Ten. Robert Redford (just perfect) and Barbra Streisand (just Streisand) hit it off as passionate but incompatible couple—but the authentic period atmosphere remains elusive. (Bradford Dillman, Viveca Lindfors.)

YELLOW DOG (Scotia-Barber)

Glossy, eccentric spy thriller about a Japanese agent loose in London. Intriguingly scripted by Shinobu Hashimoto, who also wrote *Rashomon*, but miscalculated in its attempt to blend camp violence and an inscrutably tortuous plot. (Jiro Tamiya, Robert Hardy, Carolyn Seymour; director, Terence Donovan.)



CHAPLIN'S FILMS

A Filmography

UNO ASPLUND

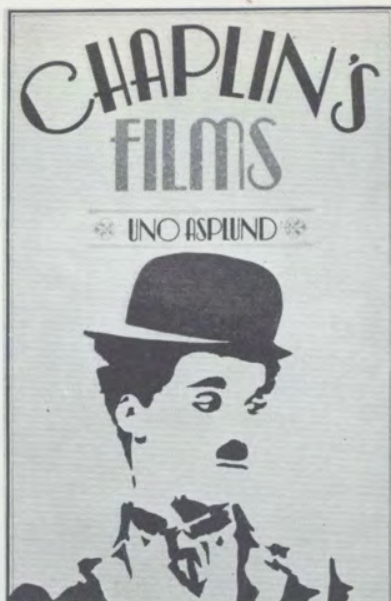
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Uno Asplund is a noted Swedish film journalist. He has devoted many years to collecting and studying Chaplin's films, of which he has a complete library.

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